

# THE SHEPHERD'S ROD & DAVIDIANS OF WACO

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## THE HOUTEFF YEARS

### THE ROD IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (1929 - 1942)

For decades, the "Shepherd's Rod" was the commonly used term for the "Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Church," a religious offshoot of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Its own members called it "the Rod"-until the splintering of 1959, when they gradually began referring to themselves as "Davidians," a name officially adopted in 1942. Under Benjamin Roden, in the 1960s, the Waco segment began calling itself "the Branch," to differentiate it from other Davidians.

This splinter organization was started in 1929 by Victor Houteff, and its unusual name, "The Shepherd's Rod," was the title of his first publication, as well as his chosen name for the organization until 1942. (One of his associates, with him from 1935 to 1941, told the present writer that the pronunciation of his name is HOW-tif.)

This entire story divides itself into the Houteff years, when either Victor Houteff or his wife Florence ruled; the Roden years, when Benjamin Roden, and later his wife, Lois, and then their son, George, were in charge; and, finally, the Howell/Koresh years, when Vernon Howell (who later changed his name to David Koresh) controlled this strange sect.

### HOUTEFF STARTS THE ROD

Victor T. Houteff was born in Raikovo, Bulgaria, on March 2, 1885. (He would later die at Waco, Texas, on February 5, 1955, at the age of 69.)

He grew up as a member of the Eastern Orthodox Church, but disassociated himself from that denomination after a disagreement with church leaders. Apparently, he was enough of a problem that the Orthodox Church requested the Bulgarian Government to expel him from the country; which they did. Houteff would be a problem wherever he went.

Immigrating to the United States in 1907 at the age of 22, he moved to Illinois in 1919, where he operated a small hotel for a time. In 1918 he attended a tent meeting, and that year, at the age of 38, he was baptized into the Rockford Seventh-day Adventist Church. By 1923, he had moved to southern California, where, two years later, he had his membership transferred to the Olympic Exposition Park Church in Los Angeles.

It is frequently said that Houteff was a "church leader." But the highest position he ever attained in

the Adventist Church was the position of Sabbath School superintendant at a local church. But then he began teaching his peculiar theories about how his enemies would soon be destroyed so he could rule the world.

All this was a tragedy, since such teachings are so different from the mild, peaceful teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

Soon complaints came from Sabbath School class members that Houteff was teaching strange ideas in his Sabbath School class and at private Sabbath afternoon meetings with some of the members. A representative group of church workers, Bible teachers, and leaders met with him to consider his views on November 14, 1929. But nothing came of it.

The next spring, Houteff hectographed copies of a study that he entitled *The Shepherd's Rod*, and distributed it to a number of the leaders attending the 1930 General Conference Session, which was held in San Francisco from May 29 to June 12. One of those who received it and had time to carefully examine it was the well-known F.C. Gilbert. A highly educated, converted Jew, Gilbert was quite solid in the faith and knew Adventist teachings well. On June 26, Elder Gilbert wrote a letter to Houteff, pointed out a number of errors in his publication, and recommended that he give them up. Gilbert also wrote to church leaders in southern California and recommended that careful study should be given to this problem before the situation worsened.

### THE MEETINGS BEGIN

On July 23, the Exposition Park Church board met with Houteff to consider the problem, but nothing was accomplished. Houteff had a grumpy personality and was adamant in his views. A second board meeting was held on August 14, at which time the following motion was voted:

"It was moved and supported that Brother Houteff be asked to retract his statement that Elder Spicer is not a Sabbathkeeper and to apologize for the disturbance in the church on Sabbath, November 30, 1929. Since Brother Houteff did not make these apologies, the motion was amended as follows, [that] the church wished to express its disapproval of Brother Houteff's action in this matter."

Shortly after this, on October 16, the union president, conference president, and local pastor met with Houteff, at which time the action taken was that:

" 'The Shepherd's Rod' is neither true to simple facts, nor true to the word of God, and it is condemned by the very 'Testimonies' it quotes from. We warn our dear brethren against the false conclusions this poor man has come to."

In November of the same year, Houteff contracted to have the full 255-page book, *The Shepherd's Rod*, printed. It came off the press a month later. In the meantime, on November 20, 1930, a special church board meeting was held, at which time Houteff was finally dropped from church membership.

At each of those six meetings, Houteff was patiently worked with; his errors were listened to and then pointed out; he was asked to retract them. On and on it went for a full year, from November 14,

1929, to November 20, 1930. Later, in 1932, Houteff wrote:

"From the very time I tried to get either a private hearing, or else some of the leading men to come and see what it was all about, pleading with them that it was their duty to correct us if we were in error, or if we had any truth that they should know about it. While they refused to give us any kind of hearing, they did everything possible to close our place of meeting, and some of those who attended these studies were frightened for fear of losing their church membership."—*Letter dated April 22, 1932, published in Symbolic Code, Vol. 10, no. 7 (May 1955), pp. 4-5.*

Houteff kept churning out more written materials. Volume Two of Houteff's book, *The Shepherd's Rod*, was printed in September 1932. Additional tracts were issued the next year, which Houteff said represented Volume Three of his book.

Because Houteff insisted that church leaders refused to give him a hearing, two more were given him, the first on November 11, 1932, and the second in 1934.

This second one in 1934 was an unusually large gathering, and was planned for a full week. An abundance of time was to be given for Victor Houteff to present his views, with opportunity for discussion of each point he presented. In addition to Houteff and several of his workers, a stellar group of church workers were to attend that gathering. Here they are:

A.G. Daniells, General Conference field secretary (formerly the G.C. president); Glen A. Calkins, Pacific Union Conference president; G.A. Roberts, Southern California Conference president; Chester S. Prout, Southeastern California Conference President; W.G. Wirth, College of Medical Evangelists (LLU now) Bible teacher; H.M.S. Richards, southern California evangelist; C.M. Sorenson, Southern California Junior College (now La Sierra College, the undergraduate division of LLU) Bible teacher; J.A. Burden, Paradise Valley Sanitarium manager (who helped found the College of Medical Evangelists, now Loma Linda University); J.C. Stevens, Glendale Church pastor; W.M. Adams, Pacific Union Conference religious liberty secretary; J.E. Fulton, Northern California Conference field secretary (a converted Jew who had written many books for the church).

When the meeting was convened on the morning of February 19, 1933, two stenographers were present to take notes. Since Fulton was not able to be present, O.J. Graf, former president of Emmanuel Missionary College attended in his place. The group agreed to hear Mr. Houteff, without interruption by anyone, until he was finished. It was also agreed to give him a full week for his presentation, if necessary, and that the stenographic report be transcribed so that all would have copies of it for careful study in reviewing the points that he had presented. It was also agreed that a copy would be submitted to him on which he could indicate correction and then return to them for retyping.

Victor Houteff immediately launched into a study on his teaching of "the harvest." H.M.S. Richards, who later became founder and director of the Voice of Prophecy, took careful notes which tell us that, at **12:30 p.m.**, Houteff refused to go further until the

committee had decided on his view of "the harvest." They repeatedly asked him to continue, but he refused to do so. Here are Richard's notes on this impasse:

"When he [Houteff] got through at one o'clock, Elder Daniells suggested we go and get something to eat and come back and take up where he [Houteff] left off. He said, No, he would not go any further, it was useless for him to go further, that our decision upon this one subject, *The Harvest*, would be our decision upon the whole of his doctrinal program, as that was the key to it. Elder Daniels urged him to go forward. He said, 'We have brought these men here from far away. They are ready to stay two days, three days, a week or two weeks, however long it is necessary for us to get the full picture in our minds. To us it is a serious thing. If you are right, we want to know it. If you are wrong, you ought to know it. We have spent a good deal of money to come here in a serious, honest attempt by the denomination to give you a hearing. Therefore let us go ahead.' "

But Houteff repeatedly refused to continue, so the meeting ended at that point. A copy of the written stenographic report was given him to correct. When he finally sent it back, it was carefully considered by a special session of the full committee. W.H. Branson, North American Division president (he would later become General Conference president) and J.L. Shaw, General Conference treasurer, were assigned the task of specially preparing the committee report, which was read to Houteff and a dozen of his followers on Sunday, March 18, 1934, at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles. The conclusion of their report was simple enough:

"Since error is found in the *Shepherd's Rod*, and it is in open disagreement with the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, the only safe course is to reject its teachings and to discontinue its study."

On March 12 of that same year, Houteff met with a number of his followers and officially began their new church organization under the name, *The Shepherd's Rod*. The General Conference soon began issuing small booklets refuting errors in the teachings of the Rod.

That was not a difficult matter to do, since Rod teachings have always been a confusing mass of contradictions, centered around the teaching that Houteff and his followers could not die before the end of time. But his theories were entirely foreign to Seventh-day Adventism or any other mainline church in Christendom!

## **THE HOUTEFF YEARS**

### **THE ROD IN WACO, TEXAS (1935 - 1955)**

Early in 1935 Houteff journeyed with friends to Texas, with the idea of establishing a permanent headquarters for their separate organization. They located 189 acres of land near Waco and purchased it. In May, he and eleven followers moved there. The new headquarters was named "Mount Carmel Center," and was announced amid the kind of cryptic prophecy that kept Houteff before the eye of the people:

"True, we are establishing our headquarters on this mount that is found in prophecy, but our stay here shall be very, very short."—V.T. Houteff, *The Symbolic Code*, vol. 1, no. 14 (August 1935), p. 5.

The place where they settled, which was supposed to have been "found in prophecy," could just as well have been called "Emmigration Gap." Actually, the center was intended only as a temporary stopover on their way to old Jerusalem. As Houteff explained it, God had revealed to him that the 144,000 were to be gathered into the Rod, move to the Waco, Texas, headquarters as an assembling point and then, from there, all would go together to Palestine where the Kingdom of David was to be re-established under the leadership of Victor Houteff. Divine Providence was to open the way so that governmental authorities controlling Palestine (from 1918 to 1948, Palestine was under British mandate) would permit them to start their theocratic kingdom which, they expected, would soon be the amazement of the whole world.

From its world headquarters in old Jerusalem, the Davidians were, according to Houteff's prophetic interpretations, to see the Adventist rejecters of their message slain, then evangelize the rest of the world, and then Jesus would return invisibly so Houteff could be the visible monarch, the King David to rule the entire earth.

Houteff's original 189-acre Waco headquarters was located near what is now the Mount Carmel Water Treatment Plant, on the outskirts of the present city of Waco, Texas. In Waco, more followers joined Houteff's organization, and his holdings grew. By 1940, the group had 64 residents and the acreage had gone from 189 to 377 acres.

But progress was still slow. Yes, Mount Carmel was the center of a proud dream; but also a miserable reality. The eleven followers (including children) that initially migrated with Houteff from California had a difficult time providing for their needs. And to make matters worse, the 144,000, that were to go with them to Jerusalem, were slow in arriving. Twenty years later, the Waco, Texas, Tribune-Herald summarized the situation at the Mount Carmel Center:

"The church has about 90 people, a third of them children, living at the center, [and] has had as many as 125 there. Most are workers, about 12 are indigents in the rest home."—*The Waco Tribune-Herald*, February 27, 1955.

Keep in mind that, when Houteff originally started the Waco center, he predicted that the Second Coming of Christ would occur within one year. Yet, amazingly, people continued to accept Houteff's theories and sending him money so he could keep mailing out his theories.

Another problem was the church school at the Waco center. The believers were sure they must not send their children to the public school in Waco, yet they had a special problem on their hands: Houteff kept seducing the children of the believers! Apparently hypnotized by this man that was ruining the moral of their young, they chose not to leave, but instead decided to close down the church school and send their children to the public school in Waco.

Marriage was another problem. Marriage to a non-believer was strictly forbidden by Houteff, so he required many of his followers to immediately divorce their mates. So they refused to come live at Houteff's Waco center.

Although, as mentioned earlier, their church organization actually began on March 12, 1934, yet no church offices or names of leaders were mentioned at that time. Later, in 1937, just after his marriage to a 17-year-old girl (Florence; Houteff was 51 at the time), this lack was supplied—with the leading positions going to Houteff and his close blood relatives. At the top was Victor Houteff, president; Mrs. Florence Houteff (his wife), secretary; and Mrs. S. Hermanson (his mother-in-law), treasurer.

(Houteff was to hold the position of president until the day of his death in 1955, at which time the Executive Council of the Davidians elected his wife to the office of vice president, her brother T.O. Hermanson to the Executive Board. (T.O. Hermanson was also son of the Treasure, Mrs. S. Hermanson.) But, oddly enough, no one was selected to fill the vacancy of president, simply because Houteff had originally written into the constitution and bylaws that the executive council did not have the authority to elect a president!)

On February 15, 1935, Houteff wrote in *The Symbolic Code*, his monthly publication for his followers, that they should stay in their local churches and not separate, for "if we separate ourselves from the organization, then in the fulfillment of Ezekiel 9, when those who have not the mark are taken away, we shall have no right to claim possession of the denomination." His point was that when, in fulfillment of his predictions, the wicked Adventists were suddenly slain for not having accepted the Shepherd's Rod teaching, then the only ones still alive in the church would be the Rodites! They could then take over the entire denominational treasury and its properties, at least that was Victor's hopeful wish.

## CHANGING THE NAME TO DAVIDIAN

It was not until 1942 that Houteff finally relented and gave his organization an official church name. The problem was that unless they formally organized themselves as a church, their members would not be able to avoid the draft during the Second World War. They immediately made arrangements for this, setting aside their former name, "The Shepherd's Rod," and now calling themselves "The Davidian Seventh-day Adventist Church." At last, they were publicly an offshoot, something that Houteff had not previously wanted to admit.

In spite of the name change, throughout the 1940s and 1950s, members of the group continued to refer to themselves as members of "the Rod." It would not be until the multiple splinterings that occurred between 1955 and 1962 that the various segments fully switched over to variations of the term "Davidians."

In 1950, Houteff referred to the fact that the Rod was but an offshoot. He spoke of "an ever-increasing family of offshoots, the most prominent of them and most tormenting of which is the Shepherd's Rod." (V.T. Houteff, in his "1950 General Conference Special," p. 3.) And, from the very beginning, this off-

shoot began off-shooting on its own. The following statement was made as early as 1934:

"The disintegrating and dividing effect of erroneous teachings has already appeared in the ranks of the Shepherd's Rod. A substantial number of them, some of them former leaders, have because of errors they found in 'The Shepherd's Rod' [publication], left the former leadership of V.T. Houteff and are meeting by themselves as a separate company. This runs true to form, and is in line with the history of preceding offshoots who have left us."—*Pacific Union Conference statement, 1934.*

Throughout its entire history, Houteff was his organization's biggest weakness. The doctrinal views that he invented at its inception contained the seeds of its later destruction. The concepts he later built on those original conjectures only added to the confusion. The underlying problem was that the poor man was obsessed with the idea that he was infallible in thought and word. His imaginings about Scripture were thought by him as the mind of God. His followers shared this delusion, thinking that he had the gift of prophecy.

As Houteff himself said:

"We must conclude that the 'Rod' contains all truth, or there is no truth in it save the quotations of truth. Therefore, if we admit one truth revealed by the 'Rod,' then we must accept it all as truth . . . Therefore we take the position that the message in the 'Rod' is free from error in so far as the idea put forth is concerned."—*V. T. Houteff, circular letter dated August 31, 1931 [Italics his].*

Here was a man who claimed infallibility without limit! He asserted that, if even one of his ideas was correct, they all had to be correct! Four years later he repeated this astounding claim (*in The Symbolic code, vol. 1, no. 8, August 15, 1935*), and again in the late 1940s (*Timely Greetings, vol. 1, no. 18, p. 10, quoting an address of his given on December 7, 1947*).

That one statement, alone, by Victor Houteff-repeated in print at least three times-should have been enough to warn any seeker after truth from following such an eccentric individual. Only God and His Inspired Scriptures are safe. The words of no one else can be as reliable.

## **THE FLORENCE HOUTEFF YEARS**

### **THE ROD IN WACO, TEXAS [1955 - 1962]**

Among other concepts, Victor Houteff taught that he would not die, but would lead his people to old Jerusalem and thence to the heavenly Canaan. Thus it came as quite a shock to his followers when, on February 5, 1955, he passed to his rest at the age of 69. "It just could not be; it just could not be: Houteff is dead and Jesus hasn't come back yet" they thought, and yet it had happened: Houteff was dead.

Victor Houteff had consistently taught that he would not die. He also taught that none of his followers would die either!

"Keep your knees in motion and let not opportunities be neglected, for the final movement shall be rapid ones. Thus shall you with God as Enoch of old, and as he was translated without tasting death, so shall you be."—*The Symbolic Code, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Oct 15, 1934), p. 4.*

"Moreover, as the Shepherd's Rod is the Elijah message, it is impossible for anyone who accepts it and lives it to die, for the type demands translation. Thus it is that Elijah stands as a type of the 144,000."—*The Symbolic Code, Vol. 9, No. 9 (March 15, 1935), p. 9.*

"There is nothing that can take the life of the 144,000."—*The Symbolic Code, Vol. 2, Nos. 7-8 (July-August, 1936), p. 11.*

"Those who believe Present Truth, yet continue to find fault with Brother Houteff's marriage, prove to us one of two things: either that they are shallow thinkers, or that they have no faith in what they believe, for the message teaches that we, as a part of the 144,000, shall never die."—*The Symbolic Code, Vol. 3, Nos. 5-6 (May-June, 1937), p. 8.*

But then, in the early spring of 1955, this notice was sent out by the Waco headquarters to all the faithful:

"Victor Tasho Houteff was born in Raicovo, Bulgaria, March 2, 1885, and died February 5, 1955, at the Hillcrest Hospital in Waco, Texas."—*The Symbolic Code, Vol. 10, Nos. 3-4 (January-February, 1955), p. 9.*

As you might imagine, the news totally shook his followers. They had believed every word he spoke as unerring.

Although Houteff had appointed his wife to lead his flock until the Lord should choose another prophet to take charge of it, his entire church organization began crumbling immediately after his death.

Splinter groups began forming here and there. Some were dissatisfied with the fact of Houteff's death; others with the fact that the organization continued to be strongly controlled by his immediate family. Because of events which occurred between 1955 and 1962, the entire Rod crumbled during that time. Out of its ashes, in the early 1960s, a number of diehard groups were to arise, which gathered together fresh, new converts.

But, as the months passed after Houteff's death in 1955, something was needed to strengthen the flagging interests of the brethren, so the leadership at Waco publicly announced in print the startling news that the 1260 days of Bible prophecy would end on April 22, 1959! Many of the followers took heart: Prophetic messages were again coming from Waco! The faithful could now make it through to the end in full assurance of additional thrilling events, predicted for them by their unique church that was so full of fascinating teachings. Everyone looked forward to that date.

But, before we come to April 22, 1959, let us first review the events before and after the announcement that predicted it:

The first intimation came only nine months after Victor Houteff's death. In their official organ, *The Symbolic Code*, of November 1955, the Rod leaders at Waco announced that "during the last months of

his life" V.T. Houteff had privately expressed certain views which his successors were now in a position to amplify.

"He expressed the definite conviction that the time prophecy of Revelation 11:2-12 and Daniel 12:6, 7 could have met their fulfillment only in type from 538 A.D. to 1798 A.D. and that they have a latter-day fulfillment."—*The Symbolic Code, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 3 [italics theirs]*.

### THE 1955 TIME PROPHECY

With that sketchy thought in mind, the leaders of the Rod were fueling up for what was to ultimately become their determination of a major time prophecy that would signalize the end of time.

"We have already entered the period of forty-two months."—*The Symbolic Code, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 13*.

"The fulfillment of the slaughter of Ezekiel 9 is immediately preceded by the forty-two months (Rev. 11:2) or 1260 days (Rev. 11:3) or 'time, times and an half (Dan. 12:7)."—*Op. cit., p. 12*.

"This period terminates with the slaughter of Ezekiel 9 (an act of God), war brought by Christendom against the two witnesses (an act of man), and a 3 1/2 -day period when the two witnesses are dead after which they rise in great exaltation by divine interposition."—*Op. cit., p. 13*.

Some people just love time prophecies. Time setting seems so exciting. But the let-down afterward is utterly depressing. The leaders pondered the immensity of what they had done. For, you see, they had already told the people that "forty-two months" had already started! Time passed, and yet they hesitated to say more. Finally, after a three-year wait-and a great deal of pressure from the field to come forth with a definite date-the major announcement came on February 17, 1959. Over the signatures of nine members of the Executive Council of the Davidian Seventh day Adventist Church, headquartered in Waco, an open letter was addressed to the Executive Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Takoma Park.

"In November of 1955, this association in its official organ, The Symbolic Code, issued its stand on the prophecy of Revelation 11:1-13, which concerns the 42 months that the Gentiles tread the Holy City, and the 1260 days the two witnesses prophesy with power (authority) in sackcloth . . . In the November 1955, Symbolic Code, we published our stand that we were then living in this time period. Today we believe we are approaching the end of it. In fact, we believe it will end sometime this spring."

The sensational announcement had been sent to the General Conference, and was immediately printed in a *special edition of The Symbolic Code, which was issued early in 1959 (vol. 14, no. 6, pp. 5-6)*.

It was predicted that, on April 22, 1959, God would intervene in a remarkable manner in Palestine and rid the country of both Jews and Arabs. Then He would remove mountains of difficulty and perform miracles of guidance so that the Davidian Seventh-day Adventists might enter the land and take possession of it in the name of the Lord. The "Davidic Kingdom" would be set up; and, from their headquarters in Jerusalem, the rapidly forming 144,000 would

evangelize the entire world, and then Jesus would return.

But just before that date, according to Houteff's theories, the men of Ezekiel 9 with their slaughtering weapons would cut down the apostates in Takoma Park (the headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination) and all other apostate Adventists throughout the world. All in the Adventist denomination who had refused to accept Houteff's fables were to be summarily dealt with. They would die a most miserable death.

The three-and-a-half year prophecy would end in early 1959. At that time the earthly kingdom would be set up, with the Davidians to be its kings and queens. The promise was also given that Victor Houteff would be brought back to life to reign over them all.

Solemnized with the thought of the magnitude of the events rapidly to follow, the faithful looked forward to April 1959.

Yet for the leaders at Waco, it surely must have been a time of heart-searching. Could they somehow be wrong?

At this juncture, you might be interested in knowing exactly how they arrived at this date of April 22, 1959. Leaders at Mount Carmel later told representatives of the General Conference that they calculated the date in this manner: The 1260 days of Revelation 11:3-6, in literal time, would be 1260 24-hour days. Since they commenced on November 9, 1955, they would end on April 22, 1959. The events of verses 7-13 were, according to the Rod, to be fulfilled after April 22.

But how did they arrive at that date, November 9, 1955? The astonishing fact is that they just selected it, almost at random, as being the date on which the "light" on the subject was first proclaimed among them at Mount Carmel! What a haphazard way to figure when the end of the world was supposed to happen!

But, haphazard or not, they were determined that this would be the great test that would make or break their entire offshoot organization. They hung everything on their guesstimate. In their open letter to the General Conference they included this paragraph:

"By this letter we make it known to you that we are now leaving this entire matter with the Lord to demonstrate whether He is leading in the work at Mt. Carmel, or whether he is leading you to stop your ears to the message which Mt. Carmel has put forth in her official publications . . . If the message and the work of the Shepherd's Rod is God's truth as we believe it to be, the 1260 days of Revelation 11 as The Symbolic Codes have explained, will end sometime this spring. Then will follow the war that will kill the two witnesses. Those whom the witnesses have tormented will gloat over this. But after 3 1/2 days the two witnesses will be exalted. At the same time will come the earthquake (shaking) in which will be slain all the hypocrites in God's part of Christendom the Adventist Church."—*The Symbolic Code, vol. 14, no. 6, pp. 8-9*.

Leaders in the Rod seemed always to have a fixation on when their enemies would be killed so they could rule the world. This morbid wish would later

culminate in David Koresh. The following clear-cut statement was written in January 1959. The same issuer of *The Symbolic Code* also made this important statement:

"If the message and the work of the Shepherd's Rod is God's truth .. the 1260 days .. will end sometime this spring. "Mt. Carmel hereby serves notice that it now leaves the prophecy of Revelation 11 as the Code has explained it, as the test by which the Lord will demonstrate whom He is leading."—*The Symbolic Code*, vol. 14, no. 6, p. 29.

### THE 1959 GATHERING

Thus the die was cast. If all these major events did not occur in the spring of 1959 as predicted, the Rod and its teachings would be an obvious fake. So said its leaders as the deadline drew near. It is astounding that, in the years since then, many forgot about what happened in the late 1950s, and continued to be lured into the ranks of Rod splinter groups.

Responding to an official call to assemble at their Waco headquarters by April 16, 1959, in expectation of a hurried move to Palestine "as soon as Divine Providence should indicate," several hundred followers gathered at the Mount Carmel Center to await the beginning of final events. (*See The Symbolic Code*, vol. 14, no. 9, third special edition issued early in 1959, pp. 2-3.)

Both eye-witnesses and published reports indicate that between 800 and 1,000 persons were gathered at the Shepherd's Rod tabernacle at Mount Carmel Center, near Waco, Texas, during the period from April 16 to 22, 1959. This number included leaders, followers, children, news reporters, and a few curiosity-seekers.

On the morning when they were supposed to do so, a delegation of several Rodites managed to enter the Takoma Park office of Reuben R. Figuhr, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and solemnly began to tell him of the doom that was coming to Adventism that day. Always in command of every situation that he dealt with, Figuhr ordered them out before they could complete their presentation.

April 22 arrived. Nothing happened. Absolutely nothing. It was, at the very least, a prophetic disaster. The largest shake-up in the history of the Rod was about to take place. Hundreds of members would drift back into the Adventist Church or out into the world. Those remaining would splinter into splintery splits.

One of the largest of these split-offs, which appropriately enough called itself "The Branch," would later send a few colonizers to the nation of Israel in a settlement project which soon withered away.

### FLORENCE STEPS IN-AND CLOSES IT

We now turn our attention to Florence Houteff. Victor had married her when he was 51, and she was only 17. So, when Houteff died at the age of 69, Florence was 35. At his death, Florence assumed full control of the Waco group. That same year she began coming out with her own predictions. Most of the disastrous predictions of the next four years were either

her brain child or were developed by herself and fellow associates at the Waco center.

In 1955, when Houteff died, Florence sold off the original Waco headquarters. The expanding city of Waco had nearly reached it by this time, and so the land was divided into lots and sold to individuals and groups. Then, with the money collected from the sale, the present property, near Elk, Texas, was purchased. It is located about 10 miles east of Waco.

Total membership in the Rod was about 1,400 during Florence Houteff's leadership.

But, when the prophecies failed to produce the Second Advent in 1959, Florence started doing some second thinking. All about her was to be seen the desolating effects of following human theories. Miserable families living on the Waco property, waiting for what?

Perhaps she was more down-to-earth and practical than some of the other leaders. She had looked into the careworn faces of the assembled pilgrims at Mount Carmel, listened to their problems, and pondered what she heard. Apparently, she saw the utter foolishness of the whole thing.

Surely, it would take someone in a key position to totally change the entire situation. From June 1960 to March 1962, she did just that.

Immediately after the debacle of April 22, special services were held daily at Rod headquarters at Mount Carmel in the hope that God would yet signally overthrow His enemies, destroy the Adventists, punish the world, and set up the Davidians in their new Palestinian kingdom. Weeks passed, and the hundreds of faithful ones, still gathered there, realized that something must be done—and soon.

At about that time, several Seventh-day Adventists came onto the property and spoke with some of them. They learned that a number of them were penniless. Many had sold their homes, businesses, and property before heading down to Waco. In fullest confidence that the leaders of the Rod knew what they were talking about, all had come prepared for an imminent move to old Jerusalem where they would be enthroned in the Davidic Kingdom, and begin worldwide evangelism.

But now, one after another, individuals and families began to quietly leave Mount Carmel. They had to find work and start life over again. By now it was June, and already a small part of the assembled Davidians had left. But the larger number were still there.

On June 20, Elder A.V. Olson, a Seventh-day Adventist General Conference officer, preached at the local Adventist church in Waco, located but a few miles from the Mount Carmel Center. On the following day two leaders of the Rod visited him and requested that he meet with their executive council. This he did, and surprisingly enough, the council asked him to speak to the entire congregation gathered at Mount Carmel!

Entering the podium of the new tabernacle, he, with the help of the local Adventist pastor, spoke to them each evening and on Sabbath mornings, from June 24 through July 7. These meetings were primarily question-and-answer sessions, with questions being sent up from the floor for him to answer. Over 600 Davidians were still encamped at Mount Carmel,

and the meetings were well-attended. Because the interest kept growing, and with it the number of questions, the General Conference sent down one of their research scholars, Elder Robert L. Odom (the one in charge at that time of putting together a special three-volume index to the Spirit of Prophecy).

Throughout the meetings, the Rod leaders were attentive, kind, and friendly. The Adventist workers were given full freedom in presenting their responses to the questions. As a result, a number of the Davidians decided to return to the Adventist denomination while others said they were seriously considering it.

At the close of the final meeting, Florence Houteff, Victor's widow and principal leader of the Rod, read before the assembly a resolution voted by her followers, in which they expressed their appreciation for the meetings held by the Adventist workers, and requested the setting up of a joint committee to analyze the teachings of the Rod and "to freely discuss our differences." *The full text of this resolution was included in an official letter sent by Mrs. Florence Houteff to the followers on July 14, 1959.*

The meetings began on Monday afternoon, July 27, and consisted of nineteen sessions of approximately two hours each. Friday afternoon, August 7, was the last meeting. Seven representatives from each organization were in attendance throughout the meetings.

At the beginning of the first session, a basic 22-point Statement of Beliefs of Adventists was read and agreed to by the Rod as being their beliefs also. Then, for ten sessions, the Rod presented the special views that they had inherited from Houteff. In the next six, the Adventists presented their analysis of those views.

The next step was for a series of replies by the Rod, but at this point a strange thing occurred. From the very start, the Rod agreed that its special teachings were based on both the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, but now, after sixteen sessions of having used both the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, the Rod representatives said they now wanted to switch to the Bible only in support of their views—without any reference to or use of the Spirit of Prophecy writings by either side in supporting or opposing their views.

Florence was at those meetings, but a majority of the Rod delegates seemed terrified to learn that they had no unique teachings to offer that were reliable. Overwhelmed, they were unwilling to face any more revelations in Takoma Park meetings.

The Adventist representatives requested an adjournment in order to discuss this new plan of action. Upon meeting again, they said that the Rod motion was not consistent with its policies and teachings of the past thirty years. Indeed, on page 11 of his very first publication (*The Shepherd's Rod*, vol. 1, 1930), Victor Houteff had declared:

"This publication contains only one main subject with a double lesson; namely, the 144,000, and a call for reformation . . . The wonderful light between its pages shines upon a larger number of scriptures which we have had no understanding of heretofore. The interpretation of these scriptures is supported by the writings of Sr. E.G. White, that is termed the Spirit of Prophecy."

Over the next three decades, this had continued to be their consistent position, as indicated in, for example, the following representative statement that ran in six consecutive issues of their periodical in the early 1940s:

"Our being, as you know, unswerving adherents of the Bible and of Sister White's writings, full-fledged S.D.A.'s, we are sure that both the Bible and Sister White's writings support the 'Rod' one hundred percent."—*The Symbolic Code*, vol. 7, nos. 7-12, p. 5, July-December, 1941.

The Adventist representatives also maintained that the recent April 22 disaster at Mount Carmel also revealed the inaccuracy of the Rod positions. An appeal was made for them to include the Spirit of Prophecy in their replies.

After another adjournment, the Rod said that they dare not include the Spirit of Prophecy in their doctrinal defense (for to do so would mean that the Adventists could use those writings in refuting their positions).

So the meetings concluded with appeals by the Adventists for the Davidians to return to the denomination. The greatest tragedy was their unwillingness to return to simple, humble acceptance of the Spirit of Prophecy! When we leave the Inspired Word of God, we are in a most dangerous position, and Satan will have the rule over us ere long.

Time passed. On December 12, 1961, Mrs. Florence Houteff and her associate leaders made a public and very frank statement in print. They declared that the fundamental teachings of Houteff and the Rod were not sound. To be certain that this statement would receive wide circulation, they again put it into print on January 16, 1962.

As if this was not enough, on March 11, 1962, Florence and her associate leaders resigned from what had been, until April 1959, the main body of the Davidians. In the process, they dissolved the corporate body and put the Mount Carmel Center property up for sale. Having done this they themselves scattered across America, just as their followers had been scattering for nearly three years.

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## **THE RODEN YEARS**

### **THE BRANCH IN RIVERSIDE AND WACO [1962 - 1983]**

The Rod had remained fairly close-knit until Victor Houteff's death in 1955. As noted earlier, although Houteff had appointed his wife to lead his flock until the Lord should choose another prophet to take charge of it, his entire church organization began

crumbling immediately after his death. Splinter groups began forming here and there. Some were dissatisfied with the fact of Houteff's death; others with the fact that the organization continued to be strongly controlled by his immediate family. Because of events which occurred between 1955 and 1962, the entire Rod went to pieces during that time. Out of its ashes, in the early 1960s, a number of diehard groups were to arise. The leading one would be under the firm leadership of Benjamin Roden.

Benjamin Roden was said to be of Jewish ancestry. Soon after the death of Victor Houteff, Roden proclaimed himself the new leader of the Rod. Then when the Waco group, under the leadership of Florence, set that 1959 date for the end of the world, Roden dramatically announced that she was wrong—that the end of the world would not come until the next year: 1960.

But, somehow, Roden's failings managed to be forgotten by the mid-1960s. He had taken leadership of one of the splinters and, in the process, founded an offshoot, with headquarters in Riverside, California.

After a lengthy legal battle, Benjamin Roden and his wife Lois were eventually permitted to occupy the Mount Carmel Center. But, by the terms of the settlement, they were required to buy out the shares of all the Davidians holding them.

Splintering continued among the Davidians, but Roden's group remained the largest of them. Benjamin Roden called himself the antitypical David, king of Israel.

After years of hard work and internecine strife, in 1978 Roden died and his widow, Lois, became the leader at Waco. It was still called "Mount Carmel," and was still located on that same 78-acre bit of scrub and pasture land, 10 miles east of Waco, near the Elk community, where Florence Houteff had relocated it in 1955. Now, once again it was becoming the center for the most fanatical elements in the Rod.

But, by this time, members no longer called themselves "the Rod." Instead, they spoke of themselves as "Branch Davidians." This was done to distinguish the Rodenites from Rod groups elsewhere, who were simply calling themselves "Davidians." In their publications, the Roden group called themselves "The Branch."

By the mid 1970s, Lois Roden had established herself as the new prophet of the Davidians. In 1977, Lois created a small sensation in the press when she announced a new teaching: Claiming to have received a vision from God, she said that the Holy Spirit was a woman. Newspaper photographers came out and snapped pictures of her holding a dove in her hand.

In honor of the new teaching, Lois and her followers launched a new publication, called the "Shekinah."

This peculiar teaching was quickly adopted by her followers, and is held today by those in the Waco center including Koresh, as well as by a number of other Davidian groups elsewhere. Keep in mind that, by the 1980s, there were over ten separate Davidian groups in the United States and several overseas. They were consistently quite small, with the exception of the group at Waco, which was always the largest and most fanatical. The people most possessed with Da-



vidian errors would move there to await the end of the world and their move to Jerusalem.

Lois died in 1986, but by then other mouthpieces were already arising. One hopeful was her son, George.

Another called himself "Eliakim." Anxious to establish himself as someone important in the world of the Davidians, a man traveled to Israel and soon began sending out newsletters to the faithful, using a concocted Hebrew name. He claimed to have a small acreage in Israel, which he said was to be used as a stopover for the Davidians when they shortly made that sudden journey to old Jerusalem, where they would all be enthroned in the Davidic Kingdom.

We earlier mentioned that the seeds of destruction of Davidianism was in its own teachings. In the early 1980s, a young, 23-year-old man walked into the Waco center.

His name was Vernon Howell. He would transform the Waco center into an armed fortress, change his name to David Koresh, and finally take on the U.S. Government.

## **THE HOWELL/KORESH YEARS**

### **THE BRANCH DAVIDIANS IN WACO, TEXAS (1983 - 1993)**

David Koresh (born Vernon Howell) is unusual. We will introduce this review of his life with these words from the Waco Tribune-Herald:

"If you are a Branch Davidian, Christ lives on a threadbare piece of land 10 miles east of Waco called Mount Carmel.

"He has dimples, claims a ninth-grade education, married his legal wife when she was 14, enjoys a beer now and then, plays a mean guitar, reportedly packs a 9mm Glock [handgun] and keeps an arsenal of military assault rifles, and willingly admits that he is a sinner without equal."—*Waco Tribune-Herald*, February 27, 1993.

Vernon Howell was born in Houston, Texas, in 1959. His mother was 15-year-old Bonnie Clark, a single mother; his father was Bobbie Howell, then 20, a carpenter. The couple split up when Vernon was 2, his paternal grandmother, Jean Holub, said, because her son started seeing another woman. His mother ultimately married Roy Haldeman and moved to the Dallas area, where young Howell grew up. He neglected his school studies, but spent a lot of time studying the Bible and memorizing passages. He also played the guitar.

His maternal grandmother, Earline Clark of Chandler, Texas, said that he was dyslexic in school and unable to learn well. After going to a special school for a year or so, he still could not grasp his studies. So, in the ninth grade, Howell gave up on school.

Dropping out, he improved his guitar playing and imaginatively dreamed up strange ideas from Bible passages.

For a time, he hoped to become a rock guitarist superstar and even went out to Hollywood for a time, in the hope of finding stardom. In 1979, at the age of 18, Howell moved to Tyler, Texas, not far from Chan-

dlar, where he joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But his grandmother, Earline Clark, says the local church disliked his long hair, casual clothes, peculiar ideas, and wild music. Two years later he was disfellowshipped for conduct inappropriate for an Adventist. The local church said they did it because his conduct was damaging to the young people of the church.

Howell promptly joined the Branch Davidians. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Waco to be with Roden's group, which, in their publications, called themselves "The Branch."

When Howell arrived, he found a power vacuum. Lois' control over the group was already waning. Some did not like her "feminine Holy Spirit" theory while others thought that her son, George, should be the leader. Still others did not like George, and were waiting for a new leader to come along.

As for George Roden, he was certain he was his father's true successor. George was a large man with a barrel chest, thick black hair, and a menacing presence. Few on the compound considered him an inspirational type. Then Howell arrived, and the two began clashing. In contrast with young Howell, a ninth-grade drop-out with a lot of Bible in his head, George came across as crude, clumsy, and somewhat confused.

(Interestingly enough, by 1976 George Roden already had grandiose ideas. That year he ran for president of the United States with Perry Jones, Howell's future father-in-law, as his campaign treasurer. His planks were the promise of 2 percent home loans for aging parents, and elimination of inflation by cutting wages and prices by 40 percent. But no one at the democratic convention gave him a second look, and his campaign died before it got started.)

Young Howell was only 23 years old when he came to Waco in 1983. Grasping the situation, he quickly made Lois a close friend. She was 67 by then. Branch followers say that she felt sorry for him because, when he arrived, he confessed to being preoccupied with masturbation. At any rate, the friendship grew strong enough that they eventually tried to have a child together. Howell was very willing to admit this union later. He said it was done 'in order to fulfill Isaiah 8:3.' But Lois carried the baby only a short time and then miscarried. Vernon had a marvelous way of taking all kinds of scripture passages and applying them to himself.

Soon he was preaching to the group. He knew so many Bible passages, and had such a way with words, that young Howell could go for hours preaching about his favorite theme: the aggressors who were soon to come from without the walls to destroy them. Eventually, when the federal agents did come, Howell had his followers prepared for their arrival.

As always, the younger members of the group quickly gravitated to 5' 11" Vernon because of his easy-going smile, flowing brown hair, wire-rim glasses, and his passion for rock music. The older ones were astounded by his wide range of Biblical theories.

## **HIS FIRST MARRIAGE**

In 1984, at the age of 24, Howell married Rachel Jones, the 14-year-old daughter of two Roden followers. Her father, Perry Jones, was an influential Davidian at the center who quickly became a strong supporter of Vernon. Rachel bore him a son, Cyrus (now 7), and a daughter, Star (now 5).

After he married Rachel, he told Lois that she needed to get her son, Goerge, off the place. But when she did not do this, Howell shunned Lois and began proclaiming himself the true successor to Benjamin Roden and Victor Houteff.

As soon as Howell began having relations with his mother, George determined to get rid of the young man. Accusing Howell of raping his mother, he threatened to kill him. After several fist fights with Howell, George began wearing a gun as he walked around the place. Sometimes he also carried a semi-automatic Uzi as he made his rounds. Although the Shepherd's Rod, turned Davidians, turned Branch Davidians had always taught that they would eventually slay Seventh-day Adventists-and anyone else who got in their way, -some later said that George's guns were the first ones openly seen at the Waco center.

Soon there would be more.

That same year, 1984, the big split came, as some sided with George while, by far, the larger part were loyal to Howell. In 1985, the rivalry between Howell and George Roden culminated in a major clash, in which Howell's group were forced off the property at gunpoint.

Vernon Howell would remember this: If he had had guns, this would not have happened.

## **TO PALESTINE, TEXAS**

Howell took his group about 80 miles east to Palestine, Texas, where they lived for a time in tents and 8-foot by 10 foot plywood packing crates. He probably selected the place for its Biblical-sounding name. The next year, Lois died. In a will, which was later invalidated, she left the entire acreage, called Mount Carmel, to her son George. But she left him little else.

George may have retained possession of the compound, but he had lost most of his followers. They had moved off the place with young Howell. In 1987, determined to settle the matter and win his group back, he went to the cemetery on the Mount Carmel property and dug up the body of Anna Hughes, an 85-year-old former member. Storing the casket inside a shed, Roden then issued a challenge to Howell: The man who raised Hughes from the dead would be the Branch Davidians' true prophet!

About now, you may think that George was crazy. Others thought so too.

Howell and his followers were to live in Palestine, Texas, from 1984 to early 1988.

## **THE NEW MESSIAH**

One day at Palestine, Howell told his group that God had told him he was the antitypical Cyrus, and that he would destroy modern Babylon, as well as the antitypical David. In ancient times Cyrus became king of Persia and conquered the kingdom of Babylon. Howell applied that historical incident to himself, and

said he would become conqueror of the world, and rule as the "antitypical David."

In his fevered thinking, Howell also announced that he was the messiah to come, who would deliver all the righteous and all who refused to submit to his leadership would be destroyed.

A later spin-off of this thinking was to be his neurotic concern to amass as many high-power weapons as possible, so he could use them in the coming crisis.

The next year, 1986, Howell added another remarkable theory to his collection: He said he was the second intercessor for mankind, and that Christ had only died for those who lived prior to His death on the cross. Nothing was sacred to Howell; not even basic teachings about Jesus Christ.

In 1985-1986, Howell first began taking overseas trips to recruit more followers. Most of his converts were teenagers or young adults, who were fascinated by his long, flowing white robes and his high-speed sermons.

It was about this time that Howell first began occasionally using the name, "Vernon Jezreel" ("Vernon, the avenging god").

## **THE 1987 SHOOT-OUT**

Learning that Roden had disinterred the corpse of Anna Hughes, quick-thinking Howell saw in this an opportunity to take back the Mount Carmel property. Delivering an impassioned sermon to his followers, he declared that Roden had defiled the body and they must immediately return to Waco, reclaim the property, and kick out Roden.

It was the morning of October 31, 1987. Denise Wilkerson, a Waco prosecutor, was told by sheriff's deputies that Vernon Howell wanted to prosecute George Roden for "corpse abuse." Since it was Halloween, she thought it was a practical joke. However, she told the deputies that, without evidence-a corpse in a coffin-she could not file charges.

Three days later, early in the morning of November 3, Howell and seven heavily armed friends climbed into vehicles and drove west from Palestine to Mount Carmel. Dressed in camouflage fatigues, they approached the compound. Later claiming that they were only trying to obtain a picture of the corpse for the sheriff's office, they waited until many of the adults and children at Mount Carmel had left for work and school in nearby towns. Then, quietly, the eight men went from building to building and warned members to leave because trouble might develop.

But one of those warned-immediately went to George Roden and warned him. Wilkerson later said that Roden grabbed his Uzi. Who fired first? The evidence is not clear.

For twenty minutes, a gun battle raged between George, standing behind a tree, and the other men. Along about that time, a neighbor living off the property, tiring of the ruckus, called the sheriff. When he arrived, the shooting stopped. No one had been killed, but Roden had been slightly wounded in his hand and chest.

All of those involved in the action were arrested and taken to town. Howell and his aides were

charged with attempted murder, then released on bond.

But Roden turned out to be his own worst enemy, for, before the case came to trial, Roden was jailed for contempt of court in an unrelated case, after he filed "some of the most obscene and profane motions that probably have ever been filed in a federal courthouse," said Wilkerson. Among other things, in his "legal brief," Roden had asked God to inflict AIDS and herpes on the judges of the Texas Supreme Court.

Howell was quick to recognize his opportunity. Immediately, he tried to move his followers back to the Mount Carmel center, but found that \$68,000 were owed to the county in back taxes. Howell found someone willing to give him that amount. Once paid, he was able to move in with his followers. He was back at Mount Carmel again!

Triumphant, he sat down and wrote a new hard rock song about George, the first words of which were these: "There's a madman living in Waco. Pray to the Prince of Hell. " You would not want to hear the rest of the lyrics. With the help of his compound band, he later taped the wild, screaming song. The present writer heard part of it on a radio news broadcast. It makes you want to run screaming from the house.

Were those words prophetic of more to come?

Immediately, Vernon Howell set to work to fortify the place.

## THE 1988 TRIAL

The eight were charged in November, but the case did not come to trial until early 1988. During the trial, Howell claimed he was only aiming at a tree, although he admitted shooting in Roden's direction. As for his friends, they testified under oath that they were merely firing their guns into the air in the hope of frightening Roden into giving up.

There was no getting around the fact that 18 bullet holes were found in the tree that George was standing behind during the shoot-out. But, somehow, this was not enough to convince the jury.

Yet it must be remembered that the prosecution, under the then local district attorney Vic Feazell, had a fatal flaw in their case: Their chief witness was George. He came to the courtroom straight from the county jail, where he was serving a six-month sentence for filing those weird motions against the State Supreme Court. In the eyes of the jury, his appearance and presentation contrasted strongly with the youthful vigor and demeanor of Howell.

Howell's followers packed the third floor hallway of the McLennan County Courthouse that morning, and, when the trial began, filled the balcony of the courtroom.

It was then that Judge Herman Fitts noted the power of Howell over his followers. Before the trial started, he asked if there were any witnesses in the courtroom who needed to be sworn in. All were silent. At this, Howell's attorney, Gary Coker, intervened. With the permission of the court, he urged that anyone who might have testimony to give would please stand. He asked a second time. No one arose.

Then, smiling slightly, Howell stood up. Turning to the spectators and looking up at the balcony, he said,

"It's all right; you've done nothing wrong. Stand." Immediately, everyone at the compound who had seen anything of the shoot-out arose to their feet.

When Vernon took the stand, he held his small daughter, Star, in his arms. Speaking with emotion, he spoke of his child and his endangered people. Then he wept. Some of those in the jury felt like weeping, too.

When George took the witness stand, he stolidly told of trying to raise Anna Hughes from the dead, and forthrightly said that he ended his prayer, "In the name of George B. Roden, amen." Jury members later said Roden frightened them.

Howell's accomplices were acquitted by the jury, but his own trial ended in a hung jury. A mistrial was declared. Later, recalling that day, Wilkerson remarked, "After the verdict was announced, a couple of jurors came over and hugged Vernon because they found him to be a very sympathetic character." Then, showman that he ever was, as the spectators were filing out of the courtroom Howell invited everyone, including the jury, to come out to Mount Carmel for an ice-cream social. Charges against him were later dropped.

Soon after the charges were dropped, Howell's attorney at the trial, Gary Coker, backed his Bronco up to the sheriff's department, and deputies loaded it with shotguns and semiautomatic rifles. All the weapons confiscated at Mount Carmel after the 1987 shoot-out were returned. Coker drove them over to the place and Howell's men unloaded them.

This gave Howell a tidy little cache of weapons to build upon. He lost no time setting to work. Letters were written and phone calls were made; gradually more and more shipments arrived. He even wrote a New Jersey firm, inquiring about the possibility of purchasing a military tank!

A few months later, George Roden, who had been jailed on contempt of court charges, was released. Under the watchful eyes of sheriff's deputies, he moved his things out of the compound. Piling them in a car, he drove to Odessa, Texas, and rented a house. In 1989, he got into an argument with a 56-year-old Odessa man and, according to the available evidence, killed him. In December of 1990, Roden was found not guilty by reason of insanity, and was sent to Vernon State Hospital in the far north part of the state, near the Oklahoma border, where he remains today.

After the shoot-out with federal agents on February 28, 1993, a reporter went to the mental institution and interviewed Roden. Looking tired, George said, "I've been trying to warn people about Vernon for years."

Although Howell and his associates were free, the trial had revealed that the Waco group was already well-armed, with at least a dozen firearms, including shotguns and .22 cal. rifles.

But, don't worry about those 22s; no one at Mount Carmel looks twice at them any more. They have bigger stuff now.

## THE HOUSE OF DAVID

In 1986, while still living amid tents and packing crates in Palestine, Texas, Howell claimed to have received a vision in which he was told he must reestablish the throne of David. And, since King David had many wives, Howell must have them too.

The next several years were preoccupied with, first, getting rid of Roden and retaking the Waco compound, and then, second, collecting wives and more followers, disciplining his children, and keeping the men at bay-whose wives he was soon to start taking.

With Roden out of the way, Howell became undisputed master of the Branch Davidians in Waco. Now he set himself to work in earnest collecting more wives and more followers. He also concerned himself with preparing the compound so it could resist an army.

First, there were the wives. Two years after marrying Rachel, Howell began taking more "wives" (actually concubines). One was Robyn Bunds, then 17. Later he took her mother, Jeannine who was 50, as another wife. On and on it went. Robyn says Howell fathered her 4-year-old son, Shaun. She later fled when he took her mother also. Both women are now living in California.

Howell also selected Archly younger sister, Nickelled Jones for his harem. Howell first forced himself on Michelle when she was only 12, and for several years kept her as another "wife." According to Texas State records, her first baby, a girl, was born on February 3, 1989, when she was 14. Former members know of several under-age girls that Howell took into his harem.

Each "wife" that Howell took was given a Star of David pendant, as a sign that she had been especially chosen by the king. Each wife was promised that her children would one day soon reign in Jerusalem with King David as joint heirs with him in his kingdom.

The ex-husband of one Branch Davidian learned that his 10-year-old daughter was wearing a six-pointed star pendant, given her by Howell. Enraged, he sued for custody and took the child to his home in Michigan. More on that later.

## THE NEW LIGHT

Howell kept inventing new theology. On August 5, 1989, at a meeting, he told the assembled group about his "new light." What he said to them that day was a blockbuster which shocked the entire colony. It was already well-known that he regularly slept with a variety of women in the compound. But now, after about four hours into the sermon, he declared that no longer could the married men on the place live with their wives! All the women were only for Howell. He announced that every marriage of Davidians, other than his, was annulled. In fact, he extended the prohibition to the whole world! He said that, henceforth, only he had the God-given right to procreate and produce children for the coming kingdom.

If you think George was crazy; well, Vernon was his successor.

Howell said that all women were henceforth appointed for him alone "because he was the lamb of Revelation." As for the men, if they faithfully re-

mained celibate, they would receive new wives when they arrived in Jerusalem and took the kingdom.

Howell enticed the women by assuring each one that she, along with her children by him, would become part of "the House of David." They would later reign with him as kings and queens in Jerusalem.

This announcement caused a number of couples to leave the compound, yet many remained. From that time on, Howell taught this new doctrine wherever he went-in America and even overseas. After this, Howell would harshly rebuke husbands in the compound who tried to maintain contact with their wives. As one former "wife" put it:

"I've had his child. He's [Howell's] slept with my mother,' Robyn Bunds said. 'I can't think of anything weirder. He doesn't even try to justify it. It's against the Levitical law in the Bible. Did you know that? It's against Levitical law to have a woman and her mother or a woman and her sister. He uses that law when it backs up something he has to say. But when it doesn't, he explains it away.'" -Waco Tribune-Herald, March 1, 1993.

As usual, Howell was cunning. When he fathered a child, he would have the mother leave the father's name blank on the birth certificate. In this way, the state could not come after him. Nor could he be legally held for child support. In recent months, a paper trail of birth certificates without father's name, by women at the compound-reveals that he sired children with at least 15 different women. But there were probably more.

Later, according to Jeannine Bunds, Howell began ordering the women not to register the births of the babies. That is a statutory misdemeanor. It would also mean the children were not U.S. citizens. But Howell cared not for anyone, as long as his desires were satisfied and his person protected.

## CHILD ABUSE

But there was more. Charges of child abuse were filed against Howell with the Texas State welfare office. Followers claimed that he beat even very young children until they were bruised and bleeding. But Howell denied these claims, and visitations by child-welfare workers turned up no evidence. However, it was said he was secretly given advance notice of each unannounced visit.

Former members reported that Howell taught that babies as young as 3 months old should be whipped forcefully. Two women said he hit their babies until their bottoms bled. Howell even banished his then 3-year-old son, Cyrus, to a garage in Pomona, California, for the night, said James Tom, a former Branch Davidian. Howell reportedly told the boy there were rats in the garage who liked to gnaw on children. The boy lay on a board bench all night in an agony of fear.

## CONTROLLING THE MIND

Then there was the continual search for more followers including pretty young girls. With George out of the way, Howell was even more free to travel around and recruit believers. With a few select helpers, he toured America, Britain, and Australia. From Hawaii, Britain, Australia, and all over North America, fresh new recruits began coming. Most

brought their money with them, and presented it to Howell. They did this because they sincerely believed he was their passport to heaven.

And when they came, Howell controlled them! One man, whose family had joined the group, while he himself never did, could not understand what the others saw in Howell. "At one time, I wondered if he put something in the water," he remarked. "Why do they think God gave them brains if they're going to listen to someone and let him make all their decisions?"

"Branch Davidians didn't depend on Howell just for spiritual guidance. They depended on him for everything. And he had an opinion on everything, from what they wore to what they ate, former cult members said. When Howell first came their prophet, Branch Davidians could buy extra food and juice drinks. Howell forbade any changes in the prescribed diet.

"He regularly checked people's living quarters to confirm his followers' obedience, according to former cult members. A family was thrown out of the Palestine camp after a search revealed they had bought French fries in town against Howell's wishes, Lisa Gent said. One Branch Davidian was banished from Mount Carmel for eating chocolate chip ice cream.

"Howell's edicts were completely arbitrary. Once, Howell ordered followers not to eat any fruit except bananas, Breault said. Then Howell would not let anyone eat oranges and grapes at the same meal. They could, however, eat oranges and raisins. It was hard to keep up with the changes.

"He was the only one allowed to eat meat,' Breault said. 'Then he was the only one allowed to drink Coke. Then he was the only one allowed to drink beer. The thing I noticed about Vernon was that whatever he was tempted with, eventually God would get around to saying it was all right for him to do.' — *Waco Tribune-Herald*, March 1, 1983.

Rick Ross, a cult deprogrammer who works in Phoenix, Arizona, has deprogrammed one Waco cult member, and has spoken with several others. In the process, he learned quite a bit about Howell, his teachings and methods. "He controls everything and everyone in that compound, period."

Ross has been involved in more than 200 destructive cult cases, and he compares the Mount Carmel group with Jonestown, a settlement of American cultists in South America's Guyana led by Jim Jones. On November 18, 1978, more than 900 people killed themselves by drinking cyanide or were murdered by Jones' men. Ross believes that Howell practices mind control, and does it by breaking them down to the point where they have little or no sense of self-worth or individuality. He conditions them to be passive and obedient.

Ross says that Howell transfers their trust in God into a total trust in him. By the time they discover things that they know are not right, they no longer have confidence in their own ability to make correct judgments. In order to further weaken their decision-making ability, Ross learned that Howell would severely restrict their diets at times. Sometimes they would labor all day on an empty stomach.

"A former member, Robert Scott of Colorado, said Howell's group could recruit anyone. 'I don't care who you are, you could be the strongest person in the world,' Scott said. 'I don't care who you are because all they need is a foothold.'

"Scott said Howell freely admitted the group was a cult. But Scott said he never perceived the use of mind control. 'Does the spider ever say to the fly, he's going to eat him?' he asked."—*Waco Tribune-Herald*, March 1, 1993.

Many of Howell's followers were highly educated. Wayne Martin was an attorney. Don Bunds, a design engineer; his wife Jeannine, a nurse. Marc Breault earned a master's degree in religion in 1988. Yet they, along with so many others, fell under the masterful power of this man who offered them the moon.

Australian James Tom recalls Howell asking him one day, "How far are you prepared to go?" When Tom looked puzzled, Howell asked, "Which of your two children are you prepared to sacrifice?"

## TRIP TO AUSTRALIA

Marc Breault left the cult in 1989, and in May asked for a visa to immigrate to Australia. Once there, he began working on Howell's followers there, and gradually showed them from the Bible the foolishness of Howell's teachings.

Howell traveled to Australia early in 1990 in an effort to reclaim his group there. Each night he would hold meetings which would last until all was weary, for they had worked all day, but Howell was fresh since he slept in every morning. One afternoon, Howell, through an intermediary, challenged Marc Breault to a verbal showdown at the home of James Tom. Breault, knowing what a dangerous man Howell could be, before leaving that evening to keep the appointment, asked his brother-in-law to call the police if he and his wife, Elizabeth, were not home by **10 p.m.**

During the face-off, Howell said he, himself, was the man on the white horse in Revelation. He said he was also the lion of the tribe of Judah because he was born in the month of the constellation Leo (an astrological symbol which, of course, has nothing to do with the Bible).

In response, Breault ridiculed his claim, for, said he, since Howell also claimed to be the man on the black horse with a pair of scales in his hand, did that also mean he was a Libra?

Very angry at this, Howell began talking as if he were not merely the sinful messiah of today, but also the pure Jesus of the New Testament! Breault and his wife were so disgusted, they left.

Shortly afterward, there was a knock at the door. It was past **10 p.m.** A voice said the police were coming. (It was merely Marc's brother-in-law announcing that he had fulfilled Breault's request.) Howell, who had just claimed to be the incarnation of Christ, turned ghastly pale, ran out the backdoor, grabbed a nearby bicycle, and began pedaling away. The next day, without stopping to talk to anyone, he hurriedly took a flight back to America. The entire experience cost Howell nearly all his Australian following.

## HOWELL BECOMES KORESH

In 1990, Vernon Howell legally changed his name to David Koresh, the name we will hereafter call him by. (He told the court he was doing it "for publicity and business purposes.") In Isaiah 45:1, he found that the Hebrew word for "Cyrus" was "Koresh." So that was the name he took. And, of course, he selected "David" as the first name. Was he not the head of the Davidians, and the new King David?

Cyrus in ancient times had been a Persian king who allowed the people of God to return to Israel after their captivity in Babylon. Over a hundred years before Cyrus' birth, Isaiah had predicted that Cyrus would conquer Babylon and free God's people (Isaiah 45). Like his chosen namesake, Koresh promised his followers that he too would lead the last-day people of God to Jerusalem, where they would be able to rule the world for a millennium.

This, of course, was merely a retake of Houteff's theory, developed back in the late 1920s and early 1930s. But, even before changing his name, Koresh decided it was time to switch over to a different Jerusalem theory. In the early 1980s, he had actually gone to Israel, visited Jerusalem, and looked the situation over. Deciding that it was not the place for him, he restructured Houteff's theory: Instead of traveling to old Jerusalem, he declared to his followers that they were to stay in Texas; the Waco property was to be their "Jerusalem" until the end of the world. Here they would await the coming of the enemy. When he arrived, they would meet him in battle. During that battle, God would step in by sending the Second Advent. The victorious Davidians would then-and not before-journey to old Jerusalem, where they would begin their millennial rule.

Well, that may sound fine. But it does not work too well when the enemy turns out to be U.S. Government agents, determined to collect a stockpile of illegal weapons.

## INVESTIGATIONS BEGIN

By mid-1992 federal agents in the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) were beginning to quietly amass evidence about Koresh' activities. They began tracking frequent shipments of firepower, that they say amounted to 8,000 pounds of ammunition and enough parts to assemble hundreds of automatic and semiautomatic weapons. In the fall of 1992, a package addressed to the compound split open before it could be delivered by the United Parcel Service. The contents were hand grenades.

In June 1992, the Waco Tribune-Herald had begun its own investigation. Apparently, for a time, neither investigative team knew the other was also ferreting information. But their efforts would suddenly bump into each other on a cold, dreary weekend near the end of February 1993. The Tribune-Herald investigation involved numerous interviews with more than 20 former Mount Carmel cult members, as well as a review of court records and statements by law enforcement officials.

## AUSTRALIAN DETECTIVE GOES TO WACO

In 1990, several former members of the Waco compound, who had left and gone to Australia, decided that they would spend whatever it took to get Koresh behind bars.

Pooling their money, they hired an Australian private detective, Geoffrey N. Hossack for \$6,000. His mission was to warn local, state, and federal authorities in America about Koresh's activities at his Texas headquarters and his place in California.

Hossack met with federal, state, and local law enforcement officials in Waco on September 18, 1990. He brought with him nine signed affidavits notarized by a U.S. consul in Australia, which laid out the charges.

Officials at the meeting, held in the federal building in Waco, included the Assistant U.S. Attorney, two men from the McLennan County District Attorney's office, an investigator with the Texas Department of Public Safety, and a member of the McLennan County Sheriff's Department. But the officials felt that no hard evidence had been given, and none of the people involved had personally appeared to state their case.

Hossack was frustrated, and told the folk back in Australia that the Americans would probably do nothing until someone had been killed.

One of the officials present at that meeting, Ralph Strother with the McLennan County District Attorney's office, later recalled:

"Oh, it got my attention. I could see this sort of thing happening. To tell you the truth, the thing that went through my mind is you've got a cult like Jonestown."

He added, "We did not have anything we could rely on to make an arrest. As I recall, none of these people on these affidavits ever came in or would come in to actually tell us these things."

But Hossack disagrees. He said that his people were willing to fly over from Australia and appear in any court anywhere and give evidence against Koresh.

## THE MICHIGAN CUSTODY CASE

Three of the former members (an American, Marc Breault; his Australian wife, Elizabeth Baranyai; and Jean Smith, also an Australian) later flew to America to appear in a child custody case in St. Joseph, Michigan.

David Jewell, who had never been a cult member, was trying to get custody of his then 11-year-old daughter, Kiri. The girl, along with her mother, Sherri Jewell, were at the Waco compound. After hearing three days of testimony (which included those same nine affidavits), Judge Ronald Taylor, on February 28, 1992, ordered that Kiri Jewell be kept from Koresh.

## ROBYN GOES TO THE POLICE

Robyn Bunds had first joined the House of David when she was 17, about the time of the shoot-out with George Roden. Gradually, with each passing year, she became more and more disgusted. Then, when Koresh took Robyn's mother, Jeannine, from her husband—Robyn's father and began laying with her, Robyn was certain that Koresh was just a pervert. For a time she, and a number of other women,

from Waco were in a harem house he had set up in La Verne, California, so they would be available when he preached in southern California. But when she tried to leave, so she could start life over anew, Robyn made the mistake of telling Koresh what she was planning to do. It was August 1990, and Robyn was 21.

The next day, after she got off work (she was a receptionist for a videotape duplication company), she returned to the La Verne house and found all her belongings gone. Koresh was as much as telling her, "See if you can make it on your own." But—worst of all—her son, Shaun, was also gone. With his usual cunning, Koresh thought this would bring Robyn back to Waco to continue as one of his wives.

But, although Koresh had fathered the boy, Koresh's name was missing from the birth certificate. The child was legally Robyn's—and no one else's. Seething with anger, Robyn immediately went to the La Verne Police Department. She told them everything—every detail, and she knew plenty of them. Horrified, they sent Detective Ron Ingels and several other policemen to accompany her to the harem house, located at 2707 White Avenue.

Arriving at the two-story white stucco dwelling, Ingels had a warrant to search for her young son. Once inside, they found the house set up like a dormitory. One room had a single bed, but all the other rooms had bunk beds. Upstairs they found about 20 women and one man. His name was David Koresh.

Ingels later commented, "The women indicated that they were dedicated and loyal to Howell and would do anything he said. It was a strange situation. All the men stayed in Pomona. All the women stayed with Howell [in La Verne]."

Robyn had earlier told the police about Koresh's many wives, and that one of them was an underage, 14-year-old Australian girl who had become a "wife" a year earlier. She told them that Koresh must have kidnapped her son, Shaun, who was then less than two years old, and sent him to the Waco compound in Texas.

When confronted, Koresh paled and admitted to the police that he had, indeed, sent the boy to Mount Carmel. Sgt. John Hackworth and the other police officers noticed that Koresh's voice was trembling. He hardly seemed a foreboding figure, a prophet with the might of Heaven behind him. He was no longer in control of a situation, and he did not know what to do about it. Worse still, his followers saw him in this condition. For this one day, he was a mere mortal.

Deciding that Koresh needed a scare put into him, La Verne police gave him 48 hours to bring that boy back to his mother—or face kidnapping charges. The media would also be alerted, police said.

Jeannine Bunds, Robyn's mother (50 years old), was La Verne harem house at the time. She left the cult a few months later and joined her daughter in southern California. The mother is now working and helping her daughter, Robyn, take a pre-law course. Jeannine said that, after the police and Robyn left that afternoon, Koresh walked around "like a zombie." He couldn't believe that Robyn had gone to the authorities. Two days later, Shaun Bunds was back home with his mother. Unfortunately, Don Bunds,

Jeannine's husband and Robyn's father, decided to stay with the Waco cult. He told them that, if he left, he would burn in hell.

Recalling her years with Koresh, Robyn said, "He has totally changed. He was really nice. He was humble. He was very well-mannered. Over the years, though, he's lost a lot of those qualities. He's become this obnoxious, foulmouthed, pushy person because of the power he has over these people."

After leaving the cult, Robyn's mother Jeannine, made an interesting comment:

"Jeannine Bunds said she now thinks Howell had another reason in mind when he took all the wives in the cult than just building the House of David. It came to her when Howell separated the married men and women.

" 'It gave him more control,' Jeannine Bunds said. 'He's big on control. If you're married, you talk, you discuss things. But if you're not with your mate at night, you can't talk, you can't put Vernon down. You don't have anybody. You're isolated.' "—*Waco Tribune-Herald*, March 1, 1993.

That August 1990 incident in California involved two raids on the house and the issuance of three warrants for statutory rape. However, nothing more was done about the matter after Shaun was returned to his mother.

## PREPARING FOR THE ATTACK

"This compound was built with a siege in mind," said Sgt. Ronnie Turnbough of the McLennan County Sheriff's Office."

Repeatedly, Koresh had predicted that the end of the world was near—and that the end would begin on the day that an attack was made against Koresh's compound near Waco. With this in mind, he set to work. When George Roden was hauled off to jail, he left a decrepit pile of little buildings behind. Everything was in disarray. The tiny houses lining the dirt road into the property had fallen into disrepair. Junk cars were scattered about. A lot of cleanup needed to be done. But more important: The place had to be rebuilt around a central compound which could withstand the predicted assault from the world.

Using money given him by his followers, Koresh transformed the Mount Carmel settlement, once a collection of old cottages scattered around 78 acres of scrub pasture and woods, into a compact fort the size of a city block.

In the process, Koresh built an underground bunker, into which he gradually piled an enormous stockpile of food and weapons. Part of this underground bunker was an old bus his men buried several years ago. Among other things, the storage facilities contained a great quantity of grains and beans. Then there was the armory; it was slowly filled with high-power weapons of various kinds. By the time of the 1993 raid, the group had stockpiled enough water, canned goods, grain, and ready-to-eat meals to last several months. Even if the electricity were later cut off, emergency generators would be ready for action.



## NOISE BLAST

The intensity of sound at Mount Carmel was frequently terrific. From time to time Koresh continued giving guitar and singing rock concerts to his group. Tapes of his earlier performances blasted through the halls at various times. Perhaps the incessant din kept his followers from thinking too much. Posters of the wild man rock guitarist, Ted Nugent, and the heavy-metal band, Megadeth, along with others, were posted on the walls throughout the compound. As usual, when Koresh preached in the chapel, he would go on for hours—and no one dared leave for a bite of food. Some of these preaching sessions went 16 hours straight. Frequently, his preaching sessions lasted far into the night.

To psychologically equip his people for what was ahead, Koresh played and replayed videos of his favorite movies about the Vietnam War: Full Metal Jacket, Platoon, and Hamburger Hill. The women were assigned various emergency duties they were to do when the inevitable attack came. As for the men, they were put through weight-lifting, military style drills, and obstacle-course runs. Of course, target practice was a favorite with them. Koresh always had lots of ammunition for them to practice with.

## NIGHT PATROLS

Each night, the central watchtower, with lookout windows facing all directions, was manned by men while others patrolled the grounds with rifles. It is not yet certain how many night-vision goggles they had. One law enforcement officer called the compound "a fort." As for Koresh's group, months before the February raid, they considered calling their place "Ranch Apocalypse." Actually, everyone on the place was required to take his turn at guard duty—including the women. Frequently, nighttime would find a woman out walking around doing sentry duty, carrying a gun, with a child holding onto her skirt. Koresh frequently warned his followers that the attack might eventually come because the world was jealous of his many wives.

Early one day in 1988, in the pre-morning darkness, a newspaper carrier arrived with that morning's copy of the Waco Tribune-Herald. Pulling up to the mailbox, he was inserting the paper into the newspaper slot—when a dozing guard was awakened by the flash of his headlights. Jumping up in alarm, he fired a shotgun into the air. Although the guard quickly apologized profusely, the newspaper demanded that the paper slot be moved farther down the road, some distance from the entrance to Mount Carmel.

## HARSH LIVING FOR THE FOLLOWERS

In spite of the rock music and posters, living continued to be Spartan in the compound. To acquaint them with future famine, Koresh decreed that they must eat a strictly rationed vegetarian diet. Daily life was a harsh mix of work and attendance at Koresh lectures. The men worked on various construction projects in and around the place while the women carried on the household chores and taught the children. Television was forbidden, children were never permitted off the place, women dressed very modestly. Koresh required special diets for the women,

such as popcorn and fruit. This kept them thin, just the way he liked them.

Some of the cult members held jobs in Waco or other nearby towns. They donated their paychecks to Koresh who doled out the rations sparingly. Older members gave their Social Security checks. Those on food stamps, handed them over.

Each morning the Branch Davidians got an early start. At **5:30 a.m.**, the men arose and, in the summer, were forbidden to drink water. "He felt that not drinking water during exercises in hot weather was a sign of toughness," said Breault. Then they exercised, and ran an obstacle course laid out by Koresh. While they ate breakfast, the women exercised and ran. Then the day's work of getting Mount Carmel ready to meet the guns of the enemy began once again. Early evening brought sermons by Koresh. Then Koresh spent much of the rest of the night with whomever he might select from his harem. The next day, he would arise at about **2 p.m.** Marc Breault, later recalled that the Bible sermons generally began about the time that everyone was tired and Koresh was ready to go.

It could get pretty wild around that place. One former cult member, who feared to give his name, later said, "You don't have time to think. He doesn't give you time to think about what you're doing. It's just bang, bang, bang, bang, bang." As if that was not enough, Koresh sometimes felt sleepless at night, and would begin practicing on his guitar, at full electronic volume, **until 2 or 3 a.m.** Sometimes he would then demand that everyone get up at that time—the middle of the night—for a Bible lecture that might last until 5 or 6 in the morning.

## EASY LIVING FOR KORESH

Yet, amid all the turmoil of preparation and investigation, Koresh continued to live a regular life. In spite of the active preparations for an all-out end-of-the-world gun battle, Koresh regularly jogged around the place, visited gun shops and pawn shops in Waco, and, in the evenings, went to pubs in town. He would turn up at local clubs to listen to live music. Brent Moore, manager of the Chelsea Street Pub, says he last saw Koresh a month before the 1993 shoot-out. Koresh arrived with a man and a woman in their early 20s, and sat, watching the musical performers, as they chowed on bean and cheese nachos, sloshed down with iced tea. Many have wondered why the ATF did not grab Koresh when he was jogging or visiting in town. Surely, this would have dispirited all in the compound. The reply has been given that the ATF was fearful lest, without their leader, the Mount Carmel group might immediately commit suicide.

Was the ATF right? We will never know.

Koresh managed to do very well for himself. He regularly had beer, meat, and the only television and MTV in the compound. Kiri, who now lives with her father, David Jewell a disc jockey in Michigan, was only 12 when taken as one of Koresh's "wives." Kiri says that Koresh often spent the night playing his guitar, watching MTV and fantasizing about Madonna. "He thought Madonna was put in the world for him," she said.

He also had his pick of the women each night. All men were required to sleep in quarters separate from

the women. So the women's section became Koresh's harem. It was well-known that he preferred the younger ones. Some of his "wives" were single, others were already married to men on or off the place; still others were children as young as 10 to 12. Marc Breault, a former member of Koresh's Waco cult, later commented, "He was fixated with sex and with a taste for younger girls." Elizabeth Barabya, another former member, added: "He said that God believed it was necessary to send him down to be a sinful Jesus so that, when he stood in judgment on sinners on Judgment Day, he would have experience of all sin and degradation." To excuse his conduct, Koresh said that God wanted him to be a "sinful messiah."

### **PREACHING THAT CAPTIVATED BY ITS CONFUSION**

While planning the layout of the compound, Koresh arranged that the arsenal of weapons was next to the chapel. In this way, if the predicted attack came while they were engrossed in one of his marathon preaching sessions, they could quickly run for their armaments.

Part of his astounding control over the group came from his sermon presentations. Koresh knew vast amounts of passages and Bible references. He would speak rapid-fire, jumping from one point to a totally unrelated one. Few could catch what he was talking about, and feared to ask whether it might be true—or question what he might even be talking about. Every so often, Koresh would fire off a barrage of rhetorical questions. Everything happened so fast, his followers were unsure what had been said. But, through it all, his voice always exuded complete self-confidence. One point ran into another, switching quickly past several to still more, and no one could afterward say what they had heard. But the sense of urgency and apocalyptic vision that they sensed in Koresh's presence kept them with him.

Karl Hennig, a schoolteacher from Vancouver, British Columbia, stayed with the cult for two months in 1987. He later told the press that Koresh's power over his followers was based on the fact that no one could figure out what he was talking about:

"What struck Hennig most about cult members was their numbing fear of never understanding Howell. They couldn't just turn to the Bible and read for themselves. As Howell had shown time after time in studies, the Bible's language was much too dense for them to interpret. They were lost without Howell. He was the fulcrum of the Branch Davidians' belief.

" 'I don't think anyone ever knew what his understanding was, honestly,' Hennig said. 'If you had given them pencil and paper, I don't think they could have written down his message. They might have a piece here and there.'

"The Branch Davidians, though, had become convinced that they would not get to heaven unless Howell showed them the way. They came to believe Howell and not the Bible, said Lisa Gent [a former believer, now living in Australia]. He had almost become their god."—*Waco Tribune-Herald*, February 28, 1993.

Another fear that Koresh instilled was the fear of hell-fire. Sometimes in his sermons he would let out a long-drawn blood-curdling scream, then tell his lis-

teners that that was what hell would feel like. "it is worse than someone flaying off your skin with nail clippers," he told them. One message Koresh made very clear: If they left him, they were doomed to hell-fire. But, since they could not understand what his message actually was, they dared not consider the possibility of rejecting it.

Koresh told his followers that he, as Cyrus, was the lamb that Revelation said would reveal the seven seals. And he promised them that, if they would stick with him, he would open those seals, give them that knowledge, and lead them into a millennial reign in Jerusalem.

All that was needed was for the enemy to come and attack them. That would hurl the whole world into the end of time. But somehow, on February 28, 1993, it did not work out that way.

### **WARNING FROM THE GENERAL CONFERENCE**

Shirley Burton, Director of Communications for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which is headquartered in Silver Spring, Maryland, says that, the early spring of 1992, she warned government authorities that something terrible was going to happen at the Waco compound. She told them to go there and do something. Here are two reports, both of which originated in her office:

"February, March, and April, 1992: Wild rumors began to circulate in the media in California and Australia. I began soliciting and accumulating information on the group after a panic call very early the Saturday morning before Easter Sunday. Australian media had reported that Howell / Koresh / Jezreel had called for a suicide / martyrdom on Easter morning as a supreme sacrifice to God. Media exposure and law enforcement awareness seemed to have thwarted the plans. There was no apparent news of them thereafter."—*Shirley Burton, "To Media Inquirers," March 2, 1983.*

"The morning before Easter last year, Shirley Burton, spokeswoman for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, said she got a terrifying phone call. On the line was a church official in Australia, relaying a warning that the next day, an explosion of violence would occur in a Waco, Texas, cult that included dozens of former Adventists. The man got the warning from parents of a cult member.

" 'The parents had just had word that there would be a 'suicide-massacre,' Burton said, adding that her mind filled with images of the 1978 murder-suicide of Jim Jones and 900 of his followers in Guyana.

"Church authorities tipped off Waco police and Easter passed without incident. But peace came to a bloody end this past Sunday, when sect members began a shoot-out with federal agents."—*Washington Post*, March 3, 1993.

It is of interest that both investigation teams began their work in 1992, within a month or two after the General Conference alerted federal, state, and local authorities.

"Last spring officials of the Seventh-day Adventist Church heard from colleagues in Sydney that the Branch Davidians were planning a mass suicide for Easter Sunday. About the same time the State De-

partment got word from sources in Australia that Koresh's group was stockpiling arms and planning suicide. State passed it on to ATF, which began its investigation in June."—*Newsweek*, March 15, 1993.

### **PILING UP THE WEAPONS**

In mid-1992, a neighbor telephoned the sheriff's office that "there is an awful lot of shooting" at the Waco compound. To deflate any concerns and answer this complaint, some of Koresh's men took some weapons in and showed them to the sheriff's office. They were equipped with "hellfire switches." Attached to a semiautomatic weapon, this electronic device enables it to fire almost as fast as a fully automatic weapon—yet hellfire switches are legal in Texas. A hellfire switch for one gun can be purchased for \$40.

When later asked about it, Assistant U.S. Attorney Bill Johnston said that the people of Texas can own as many weapons as they want, as long as they are legal. "It's not against the law to have assault-type weapons," he said. "But it is against the law to have assault-type weapons without having them properly registered."

When this was mentioned to an ATF representative in Washington, D.C., he said that "gangster-type" weapons, such as machine guns, silencers, and explosives must be registered with the bureau to be legal.

Now comes the punch line: When asked about the matter, McLennan County Sheriff Jack Harwell said that, to his knowledge, no ATF registration papers have ever been received or approved for Koresh or his group.

One former cult member, who was too fearful to give his name, said the group has .50-caliber weapons, AK-47s, AR15s, Israeli assault rifles, 9mm handguns, and one or more starlight filters for night patrol.

Another former member said those in the compound had outfitted their semiautomatic AR-15s (the civilian version of the military's .223-caliber M-16 assault rifle) with hellfire switches, transforming them into the near-equivalent of fully automatics.

A trained rifleman can squeeze off up to 30 aimed shots a minute from a semiautomatic rifle. A fully automatic rifle can fire from 150 to 600 shots per minute, depending on its rate of fire.

Another former follower of Koresh's described the collection at the compound in this way: a variety of 9mm handguns, sporting rifles of various calibers, shotguns, and even a .50-caliber heavy machine gun—a fully automatic weapon with a range of about 8,200 feet. Such a weapon would be able to penetrate lightly armored vehicles up to a distance of about 5,900 feet and would be a serious threat to helicopters flying below 3,000 feet. There was no apparent news of them thereafter."—Shirley Burton, "To Media Inquirers," March 2, 1993.

Former members recall the frequent use of the underground firing range. "We were thought of as God's marines," one of them said. "If you can't die for God, you can't live for God."

As the investigators worked and watched, they saw the compound gradually enlarged. Small houses, scattered here and there around the acreage, were torn down. The central compound kept getting bigger.

### **A POSSIBLE SUICIDE PACT**

But government agents, trying to decide what to do next, also had another fear: Word had gradually trickled in from former members that Koresh not only was preparing his followers for armed conflict, but he had also been preparing them for possible mass suicide.

The following sample of such reports was printed after the 1993 shoot-out occurred:

"We've learned from members of the cult that he [Koresh] has trained the cult members to kill themselves both with weapons and with poison," he [Fowler] said, "He's actually run training sessions in that."—Rod Fowler, *educational psychologist at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga*, quoted in *Chattanooga News-Free Press*, March 16, 1993.

## **THE DAY OF THE SHOOT-OUT**

### **U.S. GOVERNMENT VS. BRANCH DAVIDIANS**

#### **WACO, TEXAS (FEBRUARY 28, 1993)**

All hourly time in this chapter is given in Central Time, which is local time in Waco, Texas.

Waco, Texas, is a quiet city with a population of 100,000. It is actually a religious oriented city in the Bible belt of America's heartland. But it also believes in law and order. Baylor University, one of the largest of the Southern Baptist educational institutions is located there. Baylor has had its own problems in recent years, as a power struggle developed between the conservatives and moderates. For practical purposes, the moderates now control the school. Waco is a community you probably would like to live in. It is tragic that the attention of the world had to be turned to this quiet city as a symbol of fanaticism. Actually, the fanatics are not in the city, but in a small city-block-sized compound ten miles east, near the small town of Elk.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) has about 2,200 agents, 21 field offices, and 5 regional offices scattered throughout the United States and its territories. In June 1992, it began investigating David Koresh. But a separate investigation also began that same month by the Waco Tribune-Herald. The newspaper had decided that a careful investigation was needed to expose what was going on, east of town, at the Mount Carmel headquarters of David Koresh.

As the Tribune-Herald investigation neared its close, federal agents asked the newspaper to wait for a time before telling the public what was going on in that compound. The newspaper waited a full month, and then, in the interest of public safety, decided it could wait no longer.

On Friday, February 26, the editor, Bob Lott, notified the ATF that they would be releasing part of the story the next day.

On Saturday morning, February 27, 1993, the Tribune-Herald went into print with some of the findings from its eight month investigative findings. Its editor, Bob Lott, considered it a duty to warn the public about "this menace in our community."

For several weeks, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) had been trying to decide how best to tackle Koresh and his compound, which is full of firearms. So when the February 27 edition of the Tribune-Herald came off the press, perhaps they felt it was time to go into action. But Ted Royster, an ATF special agent in Washington, D.C., later said the timing of the raid had nothing to do with the Tribune Herald releases.

The next morning dawned with an on-and-off drizzle. It was Sunday the 28<sup>th</sup>. This was to be the morning. The federal agents went into action.

### **THE HOUSE ACROSS THE ROAD**

About a month earlier, several men (some reports say only one or two) moved into a house situated just across from the entrance to the compound. It was later learned that the residents of the compound were suspicious of their new neighbors from the beginning, and sentries on duty at the windows of Koresh's Mount Carmel watched their every action with binoculars. They noted with concern that their new neighbors consisted of strong young men in their late 20s or early 30s. From time to time, some of these new neighbors would drive out in cars and later return. Something was up. Day and night sentry duty was increased, and that neighboring house was carefully watched, as well as the entire area around the compound.

### **UNDERCOVER AGENTS**

On Saturday evening, February 27, a young man came to the compound and knocked on the door. He had been there before, and was expected. Desiring to know more about the Branch Davidians, with the thought in mind of joining them, he had come for an evening Bible study. Eagerly he listened as Koresh lectured to the entire group. At its conclusion, he asked if he could return the next morning for another study. Koresh agreed.

Sunday morning, February 28, was an overcast day. Arising early, as usual, everyone in the compound would normally have been busy with his or her regular duties. The men, having finished their morning exercise, would have been eating while the woman began their separate exercise regime, preparatory to beginning another day's chores throughout the building. Soon additional construction work would have begun.

But the activities were different this morning, an undercover agent later reported.

"[Tom Hill, an ATF official in Washington, D.C.] said the Davidians broke from their normal routine Sunday morning, which ATF took as an indication that they were tipped off about the raid that was coming."—*Waco Tribune-Herald*, March 1, 1993.

### **WAS KORESH NOTIFIED?**

The young man knocked at the door for another study. This continued for a time, but then, at **8:30 a.m.**, Koresh was suddenly called away to answer a phone call. He was on the phone for some time, and the young man became more and more nervous. When Koresh finished the phone call, he had no more time for the young man. That was all right, the young

man said, he had to leave right away himself, but would be back again that afternoon.

(What may be a more accurate version was learned several weeks later: One of Koresh's followers, who lived in the area, had met a reporter who was lost and trying to find Koresh's place. The follower immediately tipped off someone at the compound. Very concerned, the men tried to warn Koresh but he was busy with the Bible study with the agent and refused to be interrupted. So they telephoned a friend outside the compound, and told him to call in. When the phone rang, they went to Koresh and said he was wanted on the phone. As soon as he left the room, they told him the news. Orders were then given to prepare for an attack. When the Bible study was terminated, the agent left.)

The sentries, rotating on their 24-hour watch, were already in place. They saw the young man drive down the entrance road and, instead of turning off to the left (south) on the county road (called the EE Ranch Road), he drove to that house where the young men lived. A few minutes later, he got into his car and headed off down the road.

Another undercover agent in the compound that morning noted that, as soon as the phone call ended, Koresh had no time for anyone, but rushed over to read his Bible for several minutes, then arose and hurried off into another room. That agent, by prearranged timing, also left the compound and drove off. According to one story, he did not catch the significance of the situation. As he drove off, he sounded the "all clear." All agents were out, and the raid could begin.

However, there is another story: The Los Angeles Times reported that even before agents had deployed from the staging area in downtown Waco, one was heard shouting: "We gotta move. He's been tipped off. He's nervous and he's reading his Bible and he's shaking." ATF officials later denied that report. Unfortunately, they have refused comment on many other aspects of that Sunday morning raid, so mysteries remain.

There has been much speculation whether Koresh received a phone call on Sunday morning, tipping him off that the raid was about to begin. The ATF are convinced that he was.

"About 45 minutes before the shooting began, an agent who had infiltrated the cult's worship services saw Koresh get a phone call that he believes warned him that attackers were on their way."—*Time*, March 15, 1993.

"[Agent Tom] Hill confirmed the bureau had undercover agents within the compound before Sunday. None of those undercover officers were still inside at the start of the raid Sunday.

" 'We had our plan down. We had our diversion down. But they were waiting for us,' ATF Special Agent Ted Royster said."—*Waco Tribune-Herald*, March 1, 1993.

Later, in a telephone interview with CNN, Koresh said, "I knew they were coming. I knew they were coming before they knew they were coming."

It would not have been difficult for Koresh's group to anticipate the raid. For at least 12 hours, armed personnel and their vehicles had been at a staging

area in downtown Waco. Soon they would be heading out the ten miles toward the compound.

If Koresh was so neurotic about guarding the compound that he would stock up on munitions and have 24-hour sentries, one might expect that he would rotate someone off the place to roam around and check up on what was happening within a wider area.

### **READY TO GO IN**

After an eight-month investigation, the agency finally decided it had enough data to make a move, agents from three of the ATF's 21 field offices (Dallas, Houston, and New Orleans) began rehearsing for an air—and ground—assault.

Part of their preparation was based on a fairly good understanding of the layout of the compound, both inside, outside, and underground. They obtained their information, over a matter of months, from disgruntled, former followers who had left and from ATF agents who, pretending to be recruits, had lived and worked in the compound for a time, before leaving not long before D Day arrived.

Dan Hartnett, associate ATF director, later commented that undercover agents had earlier spotted numerous illegal weapons inside.

They had practiced for days, and were sure they knew exactly what to do. Ted Royster, special-agent-in-charge of the ATF's Dallas field office, said that, based on reports from local law enforcement officials and Mount Carmel's neighbors, ATF knew that Koresh and his followers were heavily armed, perhaps with machine guns and homemade bombs.

Royster later commented, "We practiced for it, we drilled over and over, and we had our plan down. All of it went into effect, and they were waiting." Then pausing, he added, "It appeared they knew we were coming."

According to plan, the raid was coordinated from a command post at Texas State Technical College. Their search warrant stated that the agents would be looking for various weapons and "homemade" explosives. About an hour after the last agent left the compound (other reports say 45 minutes after the phone call ended), they moved in.

The gun battle erupted about **9:55 a.m. (some say 9:45)**, but, as usual, there is no place like America: The news reporters had already begun arriving near the cult compound 45 minutes earlier! It appears they had been monitoring the police band, and caught wind that something was about to take place. The Waco Tribune-Herald, alone, had seven staffers in the area of the compound when the shooting started.

Sunday morning. One cannot help wondering if any of the Davidians—in or out of the compound—ever listened to the police band. It is not difficult to buy radios which track those bands. They could have been monitoring police scanners, just as the reporters had done.

It is of interest that the Waco Tribune-Herald reported that, just before the raid, a voice came over the police scanners, saying: "There's no guns in the windows. Tell them it's a go." If Koresh had a scanner, that would have settled it for him.

### **THE CONVOY ARRIVES**

As two trailer loads of agents turned off the county road, EE Ranch Road, into the main entrance road of the Davidian property, news teams in two Broncos tagging along just behind, continued on the county road to a point just opposite the main entrance of the compound. Climbing out, they began setting up their cameras as the men in the trailers began jumping out. As I say, there is nothing like America.

But now, let us return to that convoy of agents: Right on schedule, the two heavy-duty pick-up trucks, pulling large livestock trailers came down the county road, heading north. At the front entrance, they turned right and headed east up to the front side of the compound. What happened next? Even now, that is a very controversial question.

### **WHO FIRED FIRST?**

One view is that the ATF agents jumped out of their trailers and opened fire on the building. The other view is that they asked for entrance, in order to search for weapons, and those inside fired on them.

What actually happened? Here is the studied opinion of the present writer:

1. The ATF had practiced this raid for weeks. We will assume that no ATF leader would be foolish enough to send his men in and immediately open fire on a houseful of men, women, children, and old people.
2. When the ATF arrived, they immediately sent men around different sides of the compound, and even put up ladders and climbed onto roofs. If they had opened fire immediately, they could not have done all that.
3. Helicopters were hovering overhead, to provide an air view of the entire place. It has been said that, if the ATF was planning to fire on the building, they would not have brought those helicopters in so close.
4. Earlier in this book, we have learned a lot about David Koresh, his ambitions, goals, and fears. He had to constantly have his people with him, under his control. He dare not give this authority to someone outside. For him to open the door and let the ATF in would be to destroy his own authority.
5. The theology of Koresh was this: He would win in a shoot-out with the wicked outside world, but never in a surrender to it. For him to meekly let the agents in would be to betray all he had dreamed and taught his followers for years. The end of the world and victory for the Davidians would only come through armed conflict with the enemy. That was his thinking, and there is no reason to believe he swerved from it.

### **THE SHOOT-OUT**

With that in mind, we will now proceed to the most frequently presented accounts of what happened next:

Right on schedule, two large livestock trailers came down the road, and drove up to the front side

of the compound. About 100 agents (other reports say 50), dressed in blue jumpsuits and flak jackets, were inside. As the wheels slowed, they began jumping out. According to plan, some ran around to the sides of the house, and some took lightweight ladders and quickly climbed side roofs, so they could enter gable windows. Many agents were in front, and even before all the agents could get out of the trailers (remember: everything happened fast)-the front door opened and David Koresh appeared. Immediately a lead agent hollered out his request for entrance. They wanted to search for illegal weapons.

Koresh smiled that eerie smile of his, paused for a moment, and then suddenly slammed the door as hard as he could. It is likely that this was the signal, for the noise of it could be heard throughout the house.

Immediately, automatic weapons began firing from inside the house. Bullets came out partly open windows; they came out through the walls! It was literally a rain of terror.

According to another version, the agents leaped out of the cattle trucks, throwing concussion grenades and screaming, "Come out!" The response was a brutal hail of gunfire.

Either way, it would appear that the Davidians fired their weapons first. (Yet the Davidians would later claim that the government agents were first to begin shooting.)

It all happened so quickly that some of the agents later claimed that the men inside opened fire before they had time to even say why they had come.

" 'From the moment we stepped out of the trailer we were under fire from everywhere,' says one agent who was pinned to the ground for 45 minutes."—*Time*, March 15, 1993.

It is understandable that, because the action began so fast, different agents would describe those first moments in different ways.

Here is Koresh's version of how the shooting began, as later told by phone to a Dallas radio station: Koresh, who was shot in the arm and leg in the initial shooting, claimed he had opened the door to the compound to ask what the ATF agents wanted, when they fired on him. Cult members returned the fire, he said.

Just as most of the men had reached various sides of the compound, the flap, flap, of helicopters sounded and three helicopters, on loan from the Texas National Guard, arrived overhead. Simultaneously, as ATF officers stormed the front of the compound, two Apache helicopter and one Sikorsky Blackhawk helicopter buzzed the compound from the northeast. The Blackhawk hovered like an angry wasp just above the buildings of the compound.

Although designed to provide both overhead surveillance, as well as intimidate those inside the compound into surrendering. The terrific wind and clap-clap noise of it all probably only added to the confusion.

Keep in mind that the ATF apparently was expecting a speedy surrender, with, perhaps, a few traded shots before it was over to liven things up.

But, instead, they were met by a volley of shots from windows and walls, and the compound was full of windows and walls.

The high, square watchtower, in the center of the building complex, was especially helpful. Fire rained down from that tower on the agents. And the fire went up too. The two nearest hovering helicopters were repeatedly hit by gunfire from the tower. That gunfire quickly caused the helicopters to retreat.

For 20 or 30 minutes, the gunfire abated, and thereafter, only resumed sporadically throughout most of the rest of the day. Four ATF agents were killed and 14 were wounded during the air—and ground-attack. The amazing part is that so few were killed or injured!

Before the day was over, the total was 4 agents killed and another 15 wounded; two Davidians killed and one more presumed dead. (Later on, it would be discovered that still more inside the compound had been slain or wounded.)

Several ATF officers used ladders to climb the walls of the compound. But, as they stepped onto the roofs, they were shot at from the gable windows. Much of the firing came from the tower in the center of the compound. Of the four federal agents killed during the initial assault, three were hit on the roofs and one was killed elsewhere.

These three agents on the roof were trying to enter an upstairs window when they were shot. Dan Maloney, a news photographer with KWTX-Waco, filmed the assault while hiding behind a bus. Two agents had gone through the window, then a burst of automatic fire went through the wall, wounding an agent crouching outside. He fell to the roof, then managed to climb to a ladder and slide down. Special Agent Ted Royster of Dallas later said that two agents died on the roof, and the third, after he climbed back down the ladder. He did not know at the time how the fourth agent died.

Whether or not shooting from inside was anticipated, why did the ATF try to force its way into the compound? Why did they not just plan on a long siege and negotiation, or simply capture Koresh when he was out jogging? Jack Killorin explained the problem, and why the ATF decided to go in as they did:

"ATF spokesman Jack Killorin said that his bureau decided to move because it believed that during a long siege or even if Koresh were seized alone outside-cult members would opt for suicide, taking the children with them. And almost all [earlier] show-downs with determined and fanatical groups have led to casualties, he insisted, no matter how they were handled. 'We've gone about them in a number of different ways-ruse, ambush, siege and talk,' said Killorin. 'In almost every one, we lose law-enforcement officers.'"—*Time*, March 15, 1993.

This was the largest loss of life in the history of the ATF. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms was created in 1972 to take over enforcement of laws related to alcohol, tobacco, guns, and explosives, a task formerly assigned to the Internal Revenue Service. About 120 agents of the ATF and its predecessor have been killed during the line of duty since Prohibition became the law of the land in 1919.

In addition to ATF agents from the Dallas, Houston, and New Orleans field offices, other local and federal agencies were also involved. This included the McLennan County Sheriff's Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Drug Enforcement Administration, the U.S. Customs Service, and the U.S. Marshal's Service. In addition to the three helicopters, the National Guard also provided other logistic support.

At **10 a.m.**, the helicopters began landing north of the compound. Two of them were hit by gunfire and forced to land for damage assessment. "At first it sounded like hail, then we realized it was gunfire," said Royster, who was in one of them.

## THE HOSPITAL CRISIS

At about **10:15 a.m.**, the heaviest gun battle ended. This gave agents from the Department of Safety an opportunity to tell those press people, not pinned down by gunfire, to leave.

Ten miles west, in Waco, the two hospitals quickly became armed camps. As he stood guard at one of the two hospitals, Waco Police Sgt. Holly Holstien said, "There are some reports that some cult members got out of the compound and were heavily armed." Rumor had it that armed cult members were headed to the hospitals with their wounded. As a result, Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center and Providence Health Center swarmed with Waco police by mid-morning. Eleven police officers patrolled Providence, while 15, including the city's SWAT team, guarded Hillcrest.

"We can't afford to turn any of these buildings loose until we're sure that nobody's escaped from the compound," said Holstien.

But soon both hospitals had far more action than rumors to worry about.

Negotiations began with Koresh by phone, in a desperate attempt to get the wounded agents to hospitals for treatment. But Koresh was not so sure about that. Such mundane matters, as saving life, seemed of lesser concern. Far more important to him was to keep the battle going so the end of the world could come.

At **11:20 a.m.**, the last shot of the morning battle was fired. (Firing would resume again that afternoon.) A truce was reached so the wounded could taken to the hospital. Agents carried some to helicopters sitting in a field north of the compound, and begin loading them in. Others were taken to medical helicopters on state road 2491, a half-mile from the compound.

At **12:42 a.m.**, helicopters landed the first wounded at Providence Medical Center, 10 miles away in Waco.

Soon the two hospitals had their hands full with the wounded and dying. Janet Kemp, Providence spokesperson, said hospital officials executed their disaster plan, calling additional staff members. Hillcrest alone had more than 40 additional staff members at work, including more than 20 extra nurses, three emergency room physicians and at least seven additional doctors.

"We've called in people from all across the board," said Kim Averett at Hillcrest. "We've been so busy, we haven't had time to track them all."

Sixteen casualties from the shoot-out arrived at Hillcrest alone; three of them died.

Dr. William Daney, head of the emergency room at Hillcrest, who has spent most of his adult life in emergency medicine, said he had never before seen such carnage. "I have never seen as many deliberate gunshot wounds in all my years in emergency medicine."

Providence vascular surgeon, Dr. William Peper said the federal agent he operated on was hit at least six times by a variety of weapons. "This is a true war situation," he concluded.

Some agents lay in their blood until noon. After more than two hours of gunfire, a truce was negotiated by phone with Koresh, so that the ATF could remove their dead and wounded. Commandeering a TV truck, the agents pushed their vehicles out of the compound entrance road.

Finally, by **12:20 p.m.**, two CareFlite hospital helicopters landed half-a-mile down the county road, which fronted the set-back compound, and began loading the seriously wounded. Within half an hour, a spokeswoman at a Waco hospital announced the death of the first ATF officer.

## SUNDAY AFTERNOON

What about the dead and wounded inside the compound? Agents tried to get Koresh to send them out so they could be treated, but he was more interested in discussing his theories with them. He considered the seven seals more important than helping the injured.

The primary gun battle took place between **9:45 (or 9:55) and 10:15 a.m.**; gunfire continued sporadically throughout the afternoon. At **5 p.m.**, Ted Royster of the ATF announced that it was still going on.

Fearful of what might be in Koresh's western outpost, the La Verne, California, police hurriedly prepared search warrants and that afternoon entered Koresh's harem house at 2707 White Avenue. They found three people, but no weapons, reported Sgt. John Hackworth.

In addition, California police were giving shelter to several former cult members who, fearing that Koresh might somehow send someone to kill them, went to the police for protection.

At that **5 p.m.** news conference at the Dallas ATF Field Office, Ted Royster summarized the days' happenings. He said the death of four agents marked the deadliest day in the agency's history.

As told to CNN in a phone interview, that evening, Koresh telephoned his mother, Bonnie Halderman, in Chandler, Texas. Finding her not at home, he left this message on her answering machine:

"Hello, Mama, It's your boy. . They shot me and I'm dying, all right? But I'll be back real soon. Okay? I'll see y'all in the skies."

According to a different version of this story, reported by a former cult member, his mother answered the phone, received the message that he was wounded and dying-and then there was silence on the line. She dropped the phone in hysteria.



About **4 p.m.**, the ATF asked KRLD radio in Dallas to broadcast a message to Howell, that the agency would not use aggression if he were willing to give up. KRLD broadcast the message several times. Later, in a telephone interview with KRLD, Koresh said he was the most seriously wounded of three people inside the compound. "I've been shot. I'm bleeding bad. I'm going home. I'm going back to my father. Your weapons have overcome me this time. I begged these men to go away." He began to cry, as he talked about the 2-year-old baby which had died. He said she was his own daughter.

When asked about his wounds, he replied that he had been hit "in the gut and the leg." But, from Koresh's description of his wounds, physicians recognized that he only had two superficial flesh wounds: one in the hand and another in his leg.

## **SUNDAY EVENING**

Over the KRLD, early that evening, Koresh said: "There are a lot of children here. I've had a lot of babies these past two years. It's true that I do have a lot of children and I do have a lot of wives." Prior to this, in contacts with the public press, Koresh had always denied having more than one wife and two children.

Within the next few days, it was obvious to telephone negotiators that Koresh was recovering quite well from his flesh wounds.

At **6 p.m.**, the shooting by cult members increased. ATF agents returned the fire. Three men burst out of the compound. In the shooting that followed, one cult member was killed, another was captured, and a third wounded, but able to get back into the compound.

At **7:30 p.m.**, cult leader, David Koresh, was honored with a full-scale interview by CNN.

At **8:15 p.m.**, ATF spokeswoman, Sharon Wheeler, announced that gunfire had finally ended, and negotiations with Koresh was continuing.

Early that evening, Koresh said he would send out two children each time radio station KRLD played a message he had given them. The messages were played. At **9:15 p.m.**, Koresh released two children, and two more at **10:30 p.m.** Before the evening was out, two more children were reportedly released. Unfortunately, it would be difficult, in the days ahead, to get many more out of the compound. Interviewing the children later, they were found to be in excellent physical, mental, and emotional condition. Life amid the unusual circumstances of the compound had not adversely affected them in the least.

Koresh's broadcast messages were primarily rambling ideas about his favorite topic: the seven seals in the book of Revelation. (His former followers declare that Koresh teaches that only he can open those seals. When he does so, it will set loose catastrophic events which will end the world. Somehow Koresh never gets around to opening those seals.)

At **10:05 p.m.**, Koresh began a twenty-minute talk, aired over KRLD Radio in Dallas, in which he described some of his beliefs. During it, he said that he was the most seriously wounded person in the compound.

Shortly before midnight, a hostage negotiation team from Travis County arrived. It brought six trucks, a portable electric generator and floodlights.

Reports indicated that about 70 people were inside the compound. Later it would be learned that there were more than a hundred in there, including 38 young children.

By that evening, calls had been sent out for more agents, supplies, and equipment. In addition, 10 Bradley fighting vehicles were requested.

One hundred federal agents took part in the first day's raid. By the end of the week, there would be 400 agents, plus state and local police, SWAT teams, armored personnel carriers, and Bradley fighting vehicles. Later still, Abrams tanks-heaviest in the U.S. Army-would be brought in for the final face-off with Koresh.

Two days after the greatest terrorist bombing in U.S. history-at the World Trade Center in New York City-one crazy man and his followers in a Texas pasture had wiped thoughts of that bombing out of the minds of most people in America.

Breathlessly, a nation waited. What would Koresh do next?

But, after that Sunday shoot-out, "one of the deadliest days in U.S. law-enforcement history," according to *Newsweek*, little more seemed to happen for fifty-one days.

## **THE FIERY END**

### **WACO, TEXAS (APRIL 19, 1993)**

The stand-off between David Koresh and his followers, and the United States Government dragged on for weeks. Reading through his life, as we have done in this book, we have learned two important facts: **(1)** Koresh deeply feared arrest and imprisonment. **(2)** Former followers who had left the place said he spoke of a possible mass suicide, and, to get his group used to the idea, he had them practice for it on several occasions.

After the initial ATF raid, on Sunday, February 28, 1993, when several were killed or wounded, there had been remarkably little action. In fact, little more than conversations, broadcasts, negotiations, admissions, denials, agreements, reneging, anger, and waiting had occurred. Men, armored carriers, and tanks had been brought in. A command station had been set up, and a small army surrounded the compound.

Over a million dollars a day was spent on the government's side of the stand-off. The needs of those inside were far less. They had enough food to last a year, and a hand-pump well inside the house. When would it end? How would it end?

Former followers of Koresh knew very well how it would end. They said that, if he had his way, he would not leave that building alive.

The terrible crisis in that compound, 10 miles east of Waco, will remain a terrible tragedy long after it is concluded. Either it would end in mass suicide or in prison sentences for several of the key men in the compound. Women defiled by Koresh would have to live with the burden of what he did for years to come. The families of several government agents would long

wonder why such crazy people are still in the world. Many will question whether all Christians were like the people in that compound, when, in reality, those people were not Christians. Christians just do not shoot and kill people and indulge in such hideous adultery.

The tragedy of Waco will be with us for years to come, yet it was such a senseless tragedy.

Before Jim Jones killed all his followers in 1978, he would practice having them drink juice, then laugh and say, "See you just drank poison! I just healed you!" So they were ready when the real thing came. Both Jim Jones and David Koresh have promised their followers that, if they died following their leader, he would resurrect them.

## WORDS OF WARNING

Warnings were given, long before the fiery end. They came from former followers of David Koresh or from reporters who interviewed them:

"I do know Vernon is very reluctant to leave the property. I think he feels safer with all his people all around him."—*Marc Breault*.

"Cult members believe that Howell will 'open' them [open the seven seals], setting loose catastrophic events that Branch Davidians believe will end the world.

"As part of that prophecy, Howell, who believes himself to be Christ, told cult members that they would die one day in a shoot-out, according to former cult members.

"However, he claimed the U.S. Army would come after him, out of jealousy over his many 'wives.' Followers were told they would be resurrected after their deaths and return to slay the unbelievers, former cult members said."—*Waco Tribune-Herald, March 1, 1993*.

"When you get down to it, Vernon just did what he's been saying he would do for years."—*Marc Breault, commenting on Sunday's shoot-out*.

"None of the children Koresh released after the shoot-out were his, the heirs to the House of David, exmembers believe. So all is still in place for the grand finale.

"The adults, says [Robyn] Bunds, are probably happy to stay. They are waiting to get zapped up to heaven where they will be transformed and fight a war where they get to kill all their enemies. The only people that may be sorry are the parents who had to let their children be released.' "—*Newsweek, March 15, 1993*.

"As Vernon has said in the past, if any authorities come, he will resist with gunfire. Authorities only got what they were warned about in advance. You've seen the pictures of the compound. He designed it that way. It's clear all the way around. There's no way anyone can approach without being seen. There's no way."—*Marc Breault*.

"Former cult member, Robyn Bunds, said she's afraid cult members may be planning to die this Friday, if you go by Howell's comparisons of himself with Christ. Bunds said Howell taught that Christ died on a Friday. 'I know what they're doing, but no one understands,' she said. 'I've tried to tell authorities, but

they can't seem to understand.' "—*Waco Tribune-Herald, March 4, 1993*.

" 'We've learned from members of the cult that he has trained the cult members to kill themselves both with weapons and with poison,' he said. 'He's actually run training sessions in that.' "—*Dr. Rod Fowler, educational psychology professor at University of Tennessee in Chattanooga, quoted in Chattanooga News-Free Press, March 16, 1993*.

"A former cult member, who left within the last year and asked not to be identified, fears the cult may commit suicide. The cult discussed ways to commit suicide, the former cult member said, including taking cyanide or shooting themselves in the head."—*Waco Tribune-Herald, March 4, 1993*.

For David Koresh to come out would mean the saving of 86 human lives, including 24 children-17 of which were under the age of 10. But it would also mean a long prison sentence for him, personally, probably for life. It would also prove him to be a false prophet. And Koresh, we have found, cared little for others. He could beat and terrorize little children, lay with the wives of his most devoted helpers, and give everyone but himself an impoverished diet to keep them in line.

But to die without coming out would mean a closer fulfillment of his prophecies. He could go out as a glorious leader, a great martyr for a cause found only in the imaginings of his mind. Sure, it would mean death to his best friends, but what did he care? They were too hypnotized to recognize that mass suicide would only help him, and no one else.

## THE FIFTY-ONE DAY SIEGE

Here is a quick overview of the most significant events during the siege:

**February 28:** About 100 ATF agents pull up to the compound. In the gun battle which follows, four agents are killed and 16 wounded. Several inside are also killed or wounded (Koresh later said six of his followers, including his two-year-old daughter, had also been killed.) Not long after, four children are released.

**March 1:** Koresh speaks live over the radio, and releases ten children. This is the last live public comment by him.

**March 2:** Two women and six children are released. In a conversation with the negotiators, Koresh agrees to surrender if he is permitted to prepare a lengthy taped sermon, which will then be broadcast. That day, the sermon is broadcast on radio and television. Koresh reneges and refuses to come out with his followers.

**March 3:** Koresh tells the negotiators that he is awaiting "further instructions from God" before coming out. Another child is released.

**March 4-5:** Two more children are released.

**March 12:** Two adults leave the compound.

**March 15:** Steven Schneider, Koresh's top aide, and attorney Wayne Martin meet with an FBI negotiator and Sheriff Jack Harwell. Nothing is accomplished.

**March 18:** The FBI begins using loudspeakers to blare tapes of negotiations to Koresh's followers.

**March 19:** Two of Koresh's followers leave the compound.

**March 21:** Seven followers leave, including one who is hospitalized with a heart condition.

**March 22:** Using immense volume, authorities play moaning chants of Tibetan monks to rattle those inside the compound.

**March 23:** Another follower comes out.

**March 24:** Koresh says that they were beginning to celebrate several holy days, and breaks off negotiations.

**March 28:** After four days of silence, Koresh again talks to negotiators. An attorney, said to be hired by Koresh's mother, first talks to him on the phone.

**April 1:** Federal officials hope a breakthrough might occur in conjunction with Passover time.

**April 8:** The FBI announces that the cult leader has said there is no significance to Passover, and they have no plans to surrender when it ends.

**April 9:** Koresh sends the FBI a letter warning that an earthquake will rock the Waco area, and break a dam on Lake Waco.

**April 10:** Koresh sends out a letter, purported to be from God, which promises to smite His enemies.

As the days turned into weeks, it gradually became more and more clear that David Koresh had no intention of leaving. Of course, his former followers already knew that. They had also predicted that Koresh would ultimately lead his followers inside the compound in a mass suicide.

What was it like in the compound during those 51 days? Jesse Amen was the man who eluded agents and ran into the building during the siege, and remained there for more than a week. He describes it:

"Life inside the doomsday cult's besieged compound included rock 'n' roll jam sessions powered by emergency generators, guns lying around within reach of children, and free love for the leader, David Koresh.

"Jesse Amen, who spent more than a week inside the Branch Davidians' compound, after racing past federal agents to join Koresh, said the cult leader welcomed a violent showdown as the standoff wore on.

"David repeatedly said, 'Bring it on,' Amen said in a telephone interview Tuesday night. 'He said, We are ready, if they want to fire.'

"Guns from a reported \$200,000 cache of weapons were kept handy in case agents tried to storm the place, Amen said. 'The guns were just lying around,' he said. He added that children were often in the same rooms with the weapons.

"Amen, described by the FBI as a religious fanatic, joined Koresh on March 26. He left the compound April 4 and has been jailed on a charge of interfering with a law officer.

"During the 51 day stand-off, Koresh often responded to the raucous noises blared over FBI loudspeakers by staging mini-rock concerts on a moment's notice, Amen said.

"Koresh, 33, had long been known around Waco as a would-be rock star and even wrote a song called 'Mad Man in Waco' in the mid-1980s.

"They would play their terrible sounds, and David would just go in, crank up the generator, and play his

guitar,' Amen said. 'The other brothers would be playing the drums and David would be singing to the stars.'

"The performances would drain the electric generators the cult was forced to rely on after authorities cut power March 12, Amen said.

"Amen also said Koresh was the only 'person allowed to be with the women,' whom the cult leader claimed as his 'wives.' Koresh was believed to have up to 15 wives and fathered more than a dozen children."—[CHATTANOOGA NEWSFREE PRESS, Wednesday, p. 1, far left, concluded on p. 2, col. 1]

## MONDAY, APRIL 19, 1993

All was quiet during the early hours of Monday, April 19. Then, at **5:30 a.m.** (one report says a few minutes before 6 a.m.), the telephone rang. Steven Schneider, David Koresh's right-hand man, answered it. On the other end was a federal negotiator. The message was brief: Either come out or be ready to be forced out.

At this point, Schneider had a golden opportunity. He could tell the negotiator to wait a few minutes, while he ran and got Koresh. But Schneider probably knew that Koresh was on his usual schedule: up half the night with one or more women, and not wanting to arouse till later in the morning.

At any rate, hearing the news Steve Schneider went into a white-hot rage. Without answering, he took the telephone and hurled it through the window. When he did that, the wall connection tore loose.

That was the end of the telephone, their only link to the outside world.

The line was dead, so the negotiator at the command center, located at the technical college in Waco, hung up the phone, turned to the man next to him and said, "It's time to go in."

Media crews were stationed about two miles away on a hill, overlooking the compound. About **6 a.m.**, Texas Department of Public Safety officials warned the reporters and cameramen to "take cover."

**At 6:04 a.m.**, two or more army tanks began rumbling toward the compound. Within minutes, they began driving into the front walls, leaving holes about 8 feet high and 10 feet wide.

In response, Koresh's men began shooting from inside the building. One agent estimated at least 75 rounds were fired at them. The government agents did not return the fire. There were no injuries.

**About 6:15 a.m.**, an ambulance rushed toward the compound with lights flashing. At 6:55, authorities telephoned Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center in Waco to be on alert.

As this was going on, Koresh decided he wanted to talk to the negotiators again. He probably wanted to stall them off, but we will never know for certain. If he had wanted to leave, all he had to do was walk out unarmed with hands in the air.

But there was no phone; Schneider had torn out the wall connection when he hurled it out of the building. So they took another white sheet and painted on it the words, "Repair the phone."

That was the last message from inside the compound.

**About 8 a.m.,** an armored vehicle with a large battering arm rips into the second floor of the compound. Minutes later, another hole is punched into the second floor of the back of the compound. When this is completed, all the armored vehicles rumble off a short distance.

**About 9 a.m.,** President Clinton holds a short news briefing to announce that Attorney General Janet Reno had earlier discussed the matter with him, and that she has given a go-ahead for the plan which is in operation.

**About 9:20 a.m.,** another armored vehicle returns to the compound and bashes in a good-sized hole where the front door once was. Once again, everything is quiet at the compound.

**At about 10 a.m.,** a modified M-60 tank with a boom attached, begins pouring in tear gas through a hose.

In Washington, D.C., at about the same time, FBI spokesman Charles Mandigo announces that tear gas is being sprayed into the compound.

**At 10:30 a.m.,** FBI agent Bob Flicks said the ramming of the building and the use of tear gas was "the next logical step" to ending the 51-day stand-off.

Normally, tear gas is inside a canister and hurled. When it lands, an explosive inside blows it apart and the gas is released. But the FBI was anxious that no fire be started in the compound. So they pumped it in through hoses, using compressed air to force it into the building.

The chemical agent, known as CS, is composed of fine crystals which are as small as talcum powder. When mixed with a liquid, it becomes Mace. It has a peppery odor, stings the skin, eyes, nose, and throat. It can also cause a runny nose, cough, tightness in the chest, and dizziness. It can incapacitate a person for five to ten minutes. Therefore, the agents were careful to use a light dosage, not likely to overcome the small children.

The objective was to force the men, women, and children to run outside the building. But federal agents expected that they might put on gas masks and remain inside for awhile. This they must have done, since they remained inside so long. But the filters on gas masks give out eventually.

A gas mask or wet cloth can be used over the mouth and nose to filter out the chemical. But eventually the filters clog up.

**About 11:30 a.m.,** armored vehicles rumbled up to the building and began bashing in more holes. Then they stopped and waited. Agents, hovering behind them for shelter, waited for individuals to come out and surrender. Surely those gas mask filters would clog up soon.

Eventually the filters did clog up. Whether with the agreement of all his followers, or without it, at **12:15 p.m.,** Koresh sent several men throughout the house to set it afire. He was determined to die and take everyone with him.

The fire began four hours after the gas began entering the building.

Lantern fuel was spread throughout the building, and then at least three cult members began lighting it. Agents in protective gear were outside the building, and one, peering in through a window saw a man en-

ter a room, squat down, wave his hand about as if scattering something-and then, suddenly, a wall of fire was there.

One survivor, Renos Avraam, later said that the FBI started the fire when one of its hole-punching tanks, spraying tear gas, knocked over a lamp. But another survivor told investigators that lantern fluid had been poured through the wooden complex. That latter report appeared to be confirmed by several agents who, independently, saw men inside setting fires. Fuel containers were later found in various places throughout the ruins. The strongest evidence, however, was the suddenness with which the entire building began fiercely burning. The government has a videotape, taken by a nearby helicopter, which showed three fires in different parts of the complex suddenly starting to burn.

From a distance, a tiny wisp of smoke was seen coming out of the building. This very quickly-very quickly-turned into seething inferno. Flames and smoke poured from the compound. One person was seen on a roof. But soon there was so much smoke that he could no longer be seen.

In one instance, a woman ran out of the burning building, then stopped, realizing that, according to Koresh's teachings, she would be lost if she did not go back in. But, as she tried to re-enter the building, an agent stopped her. She was one of the few survivors.

The federal agents decide to call the fire engines. These are back at the station houses in Waco. It takes 30 minutes for them to arrive. For a time, they are stopped at a road check-point.

It just so happened that strong winds were blowing that day. These fanned the fire into a roaring mass of flame and smoke.

**At 12:28 p.m.,** someone with raised hands could be seen walking toward an armored vehicle. Then a second person came out, dragging something-possibly another person toward an armored vehicle.

**At 12:30 p.m.,** fire has already destroyed much of the building. Parts of the roof begin collapsing.

**At 12:38 p.m.,** the first fire trucks arrive at the compound. By now, it is a sheet of flame.

It was hoped that some of the mothers might have placed their children in the half-buried bus, in order to save their children. So-fire hoses were poured upon it. As soon as it was barely cool, agents went in it, in the hopes of finding children still alive within it. They did find some dead bodies, but these may have been individuals who had died earlier.

**At 4 p.m.,** federal authorities announce that there were only nine survivors.

The large compound, built within the last four years with money given to Koresh by new converts (many of which died with him in the blaze), was totally gone. Eight-six people died inside the compound, including 24 children—17 of which were under the age of 10. One was only 5 months old. Seventeen of the children had been fathered by David Koresh himself.

Eight adults and a 17-year-old girl survived. David Koresh, a 33-year-old high-school dropout, and all the rest were dead.

In addition, 21 children, who had left the compound during the siege, had lost one or both parents.

A total of 36 people, including those 21 children, had left the compound during the 51-day siege. By the end of the siege, the Texas State Child Custody Services had custody of 11 of them; 10 others had been released to relatives.

Some of the bodies had bullets in them. But it was not clear as to whether they were killed so they could not flee the building, or whether some of the ammunition exploding in the fire had penetrated them. One burned body was found several feet from the building.

President Clinton quickly ordered two federal agencies to begin investigations, and both the Senate and House started their own investigations.

The day after the siege ended, on Tuesday, April 20, the original search warrant papers—which led to the February 28 battle—were unsealed. They said that Koresh's group had spent nearly \$200,000 accumulating a high-powered arsenal in just 16 months and were preparing for "a military type operation in which all 'non-believers' would have to suffer."

## **WHAT IS THE ADVENTIST LINK?**

### **There is no connection.**

Remember that, when Victor Houteff—after being kicked out of Bulgaria in 1907 came to America—was a man who would spell trouble to any church he later joined. He could have become a Baptist or Methodist. But he happened to join the Adventist denomination (in 1918), where he remained until they kicked him out a little more than a decade later.

In the sixty years which have transpired since then, Houteff and his followers have preyed upon Adventists—and anyone else they could reach—trying to lure them into acceptance of their strange ideas that they could not die, and one day soon rule the world from Jerusalem.

But Houteff and the leaders which followed him were not Seventh-day Adventists. Nor were their followers, as soon as they accepted their strange beliefs.

For a moment, let us briefly compare some of the teachings of Koresh (who incorporates most of Houteff's and Roden's teachings)—with the beliefs of true Seventh-day Adventists:

### **THE BASIC TEACHINGS OF DAVID KORESH**

Former followers of David Koresh, declare that he has six fundamental beliefs:

1. David Koresh (formerly Vernon Howell) said he was the Son of God, Jesus Christ incarnate. Not only did he claim to be the sinless Jesus that came to earth 2,000 years ago, but he also claimed to be a second sinful Christ who must experience sin and degradation at the end of time, in order to properly judge people at the end of the world. He liked to call himself "the sinful Messiah." In short, he said he would save people by his sins. He said his father was God and his mother was the Holy Spirit. The idea to call himself Christ, he inherited from Houteff and Benjamin Roden; saying that the Holy Spirit was his mother,

came from Lois Roden. Basically, Koresh had only followed in the steps of the Shepherd's Rod, turned Davidians, turned Branch.

2. Koresh said he would be the ruler over God's kingdom, and soon he would open the seals and end all the kingdoms of earth. After that, he would rule the world with his wives, his children, and his followers—in that order of position. Yet, in order to achieve his goals, he was not afraid to burn them all up.
3. Koresh said that he owned everything and everybody. This included all women, married and single—everywhere in the world. When his followers acquired automobiles, appliances, property, or wives, Koresh considered this theft, since, in his view, all that really belonged to him.
4. Koresh said that he was the only person in the world able to interpret the Bible properly, and that no one else should try to do so. They should listen to him and do as he told them.
5. Koresh said that his most important teaching concerned the seven seals of Revelation, which, when he decided to open them, would bring great catastrophes upon the entire world. (A joke is going about the city of Waco during the February to April siege. When reporters asked people on the street what they thought of Koresh, some laughed and said they were waiting for him to get around to opening the seals.)
6. Koresh said the end would come when he and his followers were attacked at their compound near Waco, Texas. Then God would judge the entire world, resurrect Koresh and his followers, and let all their enemies be slain.

### **THE BELIEFS OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS**

Such ideas leave anyone in his right mind astounded. Such thinking is unbiblical, non-Christian, and savage. The morals of civilization would be broken down if Koresh's views were widely accepted. Everyone would be his own god, taking whatever he wanted, regardless of the rights or safety of others.

In complete contrast are the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. Their teachings are clean, wholesome, Christian, and health-producing.

As for health, several research studies have shown that Seventh-day Adventists in California have a better diet and way of life than the average person in that state. As a result they tend to have a significantly longer life span.

Morally, the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists are good for people, and help them become better fathers and mothers in the home, and better citizens in the community.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that Jesus—the Christ of the New Testament—is returning soon in the clouds of heaven, and they must prepare for that great event, through His enabling grace, by living clean, honest lives. They do not believe that God will ever ask them to kill anyone.

There are few Christian organizations in the world today which try so hard to help others, as do Seventh-day Adventists. If national disaster occurs, they quickly send loads of food and clothing to the place. This is not done to make a name for themselves, but because they want to help the sick and suffering, as Jesus did when He was in our world.

Seventh-day Adventists have one of the largest denominational hospital systems on earth. They also manufacture health foods, hold how-to-stop-smoking seminars, and conduct other types of health seminars.

A keen interest in nutrition and natural remedies, such as hydrotherapy, has always marked the lives of sincere Seventh-day Adventists.

Seventh-day Adventists try to live peaceably with their fellowmen. They accept the warning of Jesus that "all who live by the sword will die by the sword." Killing others, they consider a violation of the sixth commandment.

Seventh-day Adventists did not organize themselves as a denomination until 1863; yet, today, they are among the fastest-growing Protestant denominations in the world, with a presence in 206 countries. On the average, someone joins that church family every 52 seconds, and four new congregations are being organized daily. It is of interest that nine out of ten of its 7.2 members live outside North America.

Seventh-day Adventists try to teach others about Jesus, and how to be saved by enabling faith in Him. They explain that, by His grace, men and women can be forgiven their sins and enabled to obey the teachings of the Bible.

Seventh-day Adventists are good friends and citizens. Their way of life is not part of the problem, but part of the solution.

It is clear from the above, that Seventh-day Adventists have no conceptual relationship with the weird teachings of Victor Houteff; or Benjamin, Lois, and George Roden; or David Koresh. There is no similarity; no connection; no comparison.

The two groups are worlds apart.

## **AFTER THE SMOKE CLEARS: QUESTIONS REMAIN**

The information in the previous chapters of this book came from Seventh-day Adventist, Davidian, and media sources. The present chapter is based on findings discovered after the siege and fire ended, by an independent investigator (Linda Thompson, an attorney living in Indianapolis). The more the Waco tragedy is analyzed, the more questions there are that arise.

On February 25, 1993, magistrate, Dennis Green in Waco, issued an order for a search warrant to the ATF, at their request. Why did the allegations in that search warrant, prepared by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF), include morals charges against certain people living in the Mount Carmel Center? The ATF is only empowered to concern itself with taxes paid on certain types of guns, enforce U.S. gun laws, and search for weapons violations. It has no authority over allegations of child abuse or polygamy.

Why had not child abuse charges, when earlier investigated in 1991 and 1992 by the Texas State Department of Welfare (and, separately, by the McClenan County sheriff's department), been found to have no evidence supporting them?

Agent Agallera, in preparing that warrant, stated that undercover agents inside the Koresh complex had seen "upper and lower receivers on AK-47s." But AK-47s have one piece receivers, and do not have separate upper and lower receivers. Did the undercover agent really see AK-47s in the compound?

The warrant also stated that a neighbor heard automatic machine guns fire. Yet that complaint had earlier been reported to the county sheriff's office, which, upon investigation, reported that it had found no evidence of automatic machine guns at the complex. Koresh's group did have hellfire switches on semi-automatic guns, but these were legal. In addition, they could have had legal machine guns, if they had been willing to pay a \$200 tax on each one. But none were found within the complex. Yet the raid was launched on the suspicion that Koresh's group had machine guns which they had not paid the \$200 tax on.

In July 1992, ATF agents went to Hewitt Arms, a gun and gun-parts store in Waco. Koresh's men had purchased 225 guns from Hewitt Arms. Henry Mahon, former owner of Hewitt Arms, told Pete Zoroles of the Mobile (Alabama) Press of his phone call to Koresh at the time. He said he told him that the ATF was disturbed by all the guns that Mount Carmel Center had purchased from Hewitt Arms. Mahon said that Koresh's reply was, "Tell them to come on out." But the ATF never did, until the raid seven months later.

When the raid came on February 28, 1993, agents are shown on video footage piled behind cars and station wagons shooting repeatedly at the house. Yet there is no evidence of anyone firing back at them. The cars are untouched, and no bullets are hitting the dirt, the men, or the cars. So many agents are firing, that they have to lean out quite a distance from the car cover to shoot. Yet none are hit.

The press reported that the agents were only using handguns. Yet the video footage clearly shows several of them firing with two types of automatic weapons: MP 16 and MP 5 machine guns.

Two teams of four agents, each with a ladder, were sent to climb onto a roof and enter the complex. They are carrying machine guns. Yet, in the video footage, there is no evidence that anyone was firing at them. Upon reaching the roof, they try repeatedly to tear open a window. All the while, nothing is fired at them.

Then one man throws a smoke bomb through the window, and three agents climb in. Still no bullets go through the walls. Then the remaining agent on the roof is seen going to the window, apparently firing into the room with two bursts of his machine gun while the opaque curtain obstructs his view of the dark, smokey room. Immediately, gunfire erupts from inside through the walls, hitting him in the helmet. Did he shoot his own fellow agents inside? Did they fire back through the walls and hit him? It is known that the three agents inside were hit by gunfire and killed.

Sharon Wheeler, spokesperson for the ATF, soon after said the problem that day was that "they [Koresh's men] had bigger guns than we did." How could those within the compound have bigger guns than machine guns? If they had such guns, why did they not fire into the men and the cars they hid behind? Why did they not fire at the men bringing and climbing the ladders? Were any guns fired from inside?

David Koresh later said, "They [the ATF] fired on us first." Who did fire first? Was there any return fire?

Mike Shroader was one of the members of Koresh's group. He had gone to work that morning in Waco. Hearing of the raid, he hurried back because his wife, Kathy, and their four-year-old child were inside. When he tried to climb over the wire to enter the building, he was shot seven times: through the eye and heart, and five times through the back. Dead, he lay on the wire for days. The ATF later said that Shroader was killed because he was trying to leave the compound. He was trying to enter, not leave. If he had been trying to leave, why shoot him for trying to do so? (*Government documents say he was trying to enter, not depart.*)

Soon thereafter, the press was kept three miles from Mount Carmel Center, and other citizens five miles from it. All phone lines from the compound to the outside world were cut off. Shortly after the raid, the FBI took over, and all news came through special Agent Bob Ricks.

It is illegal to use military troops against U.S. citizens, under the Posse Comitatus Act, 18, U.S. Code 35. Why then did the FBI bring in tanks from nearby Fort Hood to surround the compound?

It is legal to use national guard troops against drug violators. But no evidence was ever found at the complex of drug violations.

Tanks were sent in to crush the cars of those who were inside the cluster of buildings. Why destroy cars, when they might contain evidence of violations?

On March 27, 1993, the London Times printed an article entitled, "FBI brings out secret electronic weapons as Waco siege drags on." In that article, two facts were revealed:

The British Strategic Air Services sent a special surveillance plane to Waco, which took thermal images of everyone in the building. Then, at night, agents crept up to current unoccupied areas of the house, and quietly inserted two types of devices in the walls and air vents—diagrams of these were shown in the article. One type was heat and sound sensing detectors, which could "see" everyone within each room and where they were located in the room, and hear what they were saying. The other devices were fiber optic cameras. The devices were attached to small transmitters on the outer walls, which relayed information to FBI receivers at a distance.

If the FBI knew where everyone was at night, why did they not enter the building through empty rooms, and capture, them alive?

If the FBI heard everything said, why did they not accept the advice of one man who fled from the complex, partway through the siege? He told them that the people inside were planning to definitely come out on May 21. Why did not the FBI wait until that date, instead of trying to terminate the siege earlier?

It was said that the FBI and ATF had to end the siege quickly because they had so many troops and tanks there.

But, if they had those sensing devices, why did they need—over two hundred troops stationed about the compound? The complex was surrounded with barbed wire, placed there by the agents. If the people suddenly tried to leave, they could easily be stopped by two or three dozen agents. Keep in mind that many women and children were involved. Why would the men, upon coming out, be expected to fire, when to do so would mean to have their wives and children shot to death as a consequence?

April 19 was the day the place burned down. Yet no reports of gunfire from inside the compound were ever heard that day—in spite of all the activity outside.

It was said that non-flammable CS gas was used that day, without success, to bring the people out. But if that had been done, they ought to have exited very quickly! According to tests made on volunteers, CS gas rapidly drives people out of buildings.

Early that morning, video cameras revealed the first tanks, as they arrived, and stationed themselves over the underground bunker and near a hole made at the corner of the house (where the tunnel from the bunker entered the building). Agents could be seen exiting and entering the tanks.

Many people were to die that day in that underground bunker.

At c. **6:10 a.m.**, smoke began coming from the underground bunker, over which the tanks and agents were located. The first smoke did not come from the house.

At about the same time, the first prodding tank retriever begins work on the walls. But it is not punching holes in the walls for air to enter. Instead, it is destroying the opening over the bunker, before proceeding to the corner of the house leading to the bunker. It is alleged that this was done so that no one within the now-burning bunker could escape.

Then the corner end of the house, over the entrance to the burning bunker, is destroyed by the tank. This would effectively block the other entrance to the bunker.

Three holes are then punched into the walls to collapse three stairwells, effectively cutting off the possibility that anyone could go up or down those stairs. This stopped access to or from the second floor. Why would that be done, if they wanted those inside to run out of the building? The sensors would notify the FBI what later morgue analysis revealed: the children were on the second floor.

Why does the video next show a tank moving to the walls—with a flaming jet of burning gas issuing out of a nozzle attached to its forward end? Why then are flames immediately seen issuing from nearby windows?

Why did the video show a man on the roof of the house, who jumped down, and then slowly walked away, without being intercepted by an agent. Yet he was later said to have been someone escaping from the compound.

Why was there no evidence of gunfire from inside the building at any time during that day?



Why were agents seen walking around the building in large numbers-yet none were fired on, ducking for cover, or firing at the building?

As the building burned, why did tanks methodically push outer portions of the complex into the fire-apparently so everything could be more completely destroyed?

Waco may remain an enigma for many years to come.